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CHRIST'S AUTHORITY

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CHRIST'S AUTHORITY

AND OTHER SERMONS

BY THE LATE

ARCHIBALD WATSON, D.D.

MINISTER OF THE PARISH OF DUNDEE
AND ONE OF HER MAJESTY'S CHAPLAINS FOR SCOTLAND

WITH A PREFACE

BY

JOHN CAIRD, D.D.

PRINCIPAL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
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P R E F A C E.

FOR Scottish readers, and especially for the members of the Church of Scotland, a volume of sermons by the late Dr Watson needs no preface. His wisdom and goodness, his moral earnestness and practical sagacity, his ability as a preacher, and his influence in the counsels of the Church, are too fresh in the recollection of those at least who belonged to his own communion, to call for any formal tribute to his memory. For others, however, into whose hands this book may fall, a few sentences of explanation may be necessary.

The author of these sermons was a clergyman of the Church of Scotland. He was born at Lochwinnoch, Renfrewshire, in 1821; and educated in the parish school of Lochwinnoch, and at

the University of Glasgow. He was ordained to the parish of St Matthew's, Glasgow, in 1846; and translated to that of St Mary's, Dundee, in 1862. He was appointed one of her Majesty's Chaplains for Scotland in 1869; and Moderator of the General Assembly in 1880; and he died on the 20th July 1881.

At college, where I first knew him, though a respectable, he was not by any means a distinguished student. Partly this arose from the fact that his time was much occupied in private tuition, and that it was only a fragment of it he could give to college studies; but the main reason, probably, was, that his was one of those minds which ripen slowly, and that the intellectual stimulus which others find in personal ambition and the competition for university honours, came to him only at a later period from the quickening of his moral nature amidst the practical exigencies of life. Then, as throughout life, he was singularly unpretending in manner, somewhat taciturn and self-contained amongst strangers, and only breaking through the crust of reserve in the society of intimate friends. Even those who knew him

best in these early days were far from discerning in him that mental power and force of character which he afterwards manifested, and probably he himself was all but unconscious of his own latent resources. Early struggles had left their mark on him in a pensive and somewhat desponding turn of mind. He had no youthful day-dreams of future fame or success in life; and I can remember how he would listen with a certain grave incredulousness to the ambitious aspirations in which his more sanguine or less humble-minded friends were wont to indulge. It was not till he had fairly entered on the duties of his profession that he began to show what manner of man he was; though, even then, the power that was in him was only slowly and gradually developed. Whilst others much beneath him in ability and attainments were rising into popularity and preferment, he remained for years comparatively unknown. Already, indeed, ere he had been long settled in his first parish, his powers of organisation, and his singular practical sagacity, began to manifest themselves; but in the pulpit it was long before he attained to his full

strength. There are few preachers who can look back on their first sermons with much satisfaction, and the sermons of Dr Watson's earlier years, though always earnest and practical, were, as might be expected, cruder in thought, more unformed in style, and less free from conventional phraseology, than those of his later ministry. But in reading his manuscripts, I have found the contrast in his case more remarkable than usual. The thought and style have become so modified in the later productions of his pen, that the same hand can scarcely be traced in them.

Something of this progress is to be ascribed to the changing spirit of the time in which he lived. Never, perhaps, since the Reformation, has there been in the ecclesiastical history of Scotland a period of greater theological change—more remarkable for the influx of new, and the modification of old, ideas and forms of thought—than the last thirty or forty years. Up to the beginning of that period the ecclesiastical mind of Scotland had been almost entirely secluded from foreign influences. The philosophy and theology of Germany were little

known ; and the few specimens of its historical and Biblical criticism which had reached us through the medium of translations, served only to awaken a vague feeling of surprise and aversion. The relations of science and theology were still amicable, or only slightly disturbed in the direction of geological research and its bearing on the Scripture narrative of the six days' creation. The Calvinistic dogmas, in their hardest and most unmitigated form, were still the staple of the sermons both in the Established and Dissenting Churches, and a jealous espionage prevented or avenged the slightest departure from traditional orthodoxy. Profound thought and almost apostolic saintliness of life had not saved from deposition a minister of the Church of Scotland whose teaching has for a generation past moulded the minds and been echoed from the pulpits of the most thoughtful of her clergy ; and the aberrations of lesser lights had been followed by a similar penalty.

But the time had come when, from causes into which this is not the place to enter, this state of things was no longer to continue. It

became impossible for the Churches, even in a country hitherto so firmly entrenched in the orthodox traditions, to resist the wave of theological change that was moving the world. Silently and by almost imperceptible gradations a new spirit crept over the minds of a new generation of preachers. The sermons of at least the more cultured of the younger clergy became less technical and professional, more natural and human. More and more stress was laid on the appeal of Christian truth to the spiritual intelligence; those aspects of the Calvinistic doctrines which seemed repulsive to reason and conscience ceased to be insisted on; and Christianity began to be exhibited, not as an arbitrary "scheme" for the attainment of a future salvation, but as the revelation of a divine ideal for humanity, and the highest agent in the moral and spiritual education of the world. The hard and fast division between theology and other departments of human knowledge was no longer maintained. The old jealousy of science and philosophy came to be regarded by most men as an unworthy superstition, and art was gradually

exerting a refining influence on the hitherto bare and unattractive Presbyterian form of worship. The rivalries and animosities of sects, though far from being extinguished, began, in the light of common-sense and a more intelligent public opinion, to bate something of their former bitterness. It became more and more difficult to awaken in the minds of the educated laity any sympathy with clerical factions or controversies on obscure points of ecclesiastical polity. Within the Churches themselves a freer and more tolerant spirit gradually asserted itself: the tyranny of fanatical majorities lost something of its terrors; individual liberty was no longer relentlessly suppressed; and not only in the Established Church, but even in the narrowest of the sects, opinions began to be boldly expressed which in former days would have been visited with summary expulsion from the communion of the faithful.¹

There are minds which, in an age of transition, resist all the influences of the spirit of the

¹ In an article in the 'Scottish Review' on "Progress of Theology in Scotland," which I have seen since the above was written, a similar line of remark will be found.

time,—either blindly and from the mere force of custom, or because to them the traditional opinions and modes of belief have become, apart from their own meaning, the symbols of all that is holy and sacred. There are other minds which lightly drift with the spirit of the time, and are swept from their old moorings simply because their hold on these or any other is too slight to resist the prevailing current of opinion. But there is yet a third class, who feel and respond to all that is real and rational in the new ideas, and who feel and respond to these ideas in a deeper way just because there is a side of their nature which at first rises in instinctive revolt against them. Long before awakening thought renders such men capable of intelligent conviction, the traditional beliefs have been lodged in their minds, and have drawn to themselves all the authority that reverential feeling can lend to them. They have become almost inseparably associated with piety and goodness, with the recollections of childhood and the memory of revered teachers and friends. It is hard to let go one's hold on opinions thus endeared; but into a mind that is of an intel-

lectual and spiritual mould strong enough to overpower the retarding influences of association and instinctive reverence, the new or modified beliefs enter with a force of conviction all the greater from the moral resistance they have had to overcome.

In reading the MS. sermons from which this volume has been selected, I have been able to trace in them a mental history such as that which I have just indicated. Even the earliest of these sermons contain at least the germs of something beyond the conventional type of orthodoxy. But there is in them a large admixture of unassimilated matter—of the formulas and phraseology of so-called “evangelical” doctrine which authority and early associations had rendered sacred to a devout and earnest mind—and the strongly marked individuality which breathes through every sermon of his later years, is as yet all but suppressed. It would be easy, guided by the MSS. before me, to trace from this point the steps of the writer’s intellectual and spiritual progress ; but I cannot expect that the general reader should follow this process of development with the minute

interest it has had for my own mind. It is enough to say that in almost every successive year of his ministry I can discern the indications of a gradually widening intellectual horizon, of a constant endeavour to infuse a spiritual meaning into doctrines hitherto taken on trust, and of the modification and final rejection or ignoring of theological abstractions in which he had ceased to find food for spiritual thought and life. As the years come and go, the sermons become richer in ideas, the movement of thought in them is more spontaneous and independent, and the style simpler and less formal ; but they also become characterised by a deeper insight into the human heart, a tenderer sympathy with the sorrows and struggles of human life, and a more far-seeing practical sagacity in dealing with its manifold difficulties and perplexities.

One of the influences which brought about or contributed to this gradual improvement was, undoubtedly, that to which I have above adverted. It was impossible, in a period of criticism and reconstruction, for such a mind as his to remain stationary. His vigorous intel-

ligence, his strong good sense, his singular candour and freedom from professional narrowness, rendered him open to all the liberalising influences of the time. In one point of view, indeed, the wider and deeper tone of his teaching, though it reflected the theological movement of the time, was not due to any direct or immediate participation in it. It was rather the results of critical and speculative inquiry, than the process of investigation with which he concerned himself. The conditions of a Scottish clergyman's life in a large and populous town, even when the scientific instinct is strong in him, are almost fatal to its development. The duties imposed on a conscientious man in such a position are so multifarious and incessant, that studies not related to the immediate exigencies of the pulpit are for him practically all but proscribed. Even, therefore, had the natural bent of my friend's mind been towards scientific inquiry, circumstances would have compelled him to repress it. But I question whether, even had the outward conditions of his life been different, his turn of mind would have admitted of the continuous devotion of time and thought

to theological investigation. Not that there was in him any lack of mental power or scholarly acquirement. His clear judgment and native force of intelligence made him wise in counsel, a sagacious man of business, and much sought after for advice and guidance both in private life and in positions of public trust. But the practical side of his nature was so strongly developed, his moral and religious sympathies were so intense, and the demand for the dedication of his faculties to works of practical philanthropy was so urgently felt by him, as, if not to deprive purely scientific questions of all interest, yet to dispose him to look at them chiefly in their bearing on the social and spiritual welfare of mankind. Thus, whilst there was in him nothing of the intolerant obscurantism of the so-called "practical" man, his temperament rendered him somewhat impatient of what he deemed mere speculative subtleties, and led him sometimes to apply the test of immediate utility to problems which are essentially incapable of any such solution.

Yet, on the other hand, it was this same quality of practical wisdom which gave, both

negatively and positively, an ever-increasing power to his teaching. Negatively, it rendered his preaching less theological; positively, it enriched it with the results of a growing experience of human nature and human life. Whatever may be the value of scientific theology, the pulpit is not the place for it. Still less is it the place for that strange compound of Aristotelian logic and Scripture texts which, created by scholastic metaphysic, has infused itself into the theological systems of the modern Churches. Whether tenable or not, the apprehension of the truth of such notions does not depend on or decide anything as to the moral and spiritual condition of the soul, whatever it may imply as to the acuteness or dulness of its logical faculties. The progress of a religious teacher, therefore—his appreciation of the greatness of his office in its relation to man's spiritual needs—is indicated, in part at least, by the measure in which this barren element drops away from his preaching, and gives place to those universal truths which are the perennial springs of the soul's life, and which "commend themselves to man's conscience in the sight of

God." Measured by this test, the sermons of Dr Watson's later are remarkably in advance of those of his earlier years. Theological dogmas, to which at best only a forced and unintelligent assent can be given, and which, instead of elevating and purifying the heart and life, serve only to bewilder the understanding, become less and less prominent, until in the sermons which compose this volume they have entirely disappeared. The fatherhood of God, the revelation of infinite love and goodness in the life of Christ, the possibility of divine knowledge only for the pure in heart, the possession of the mind of Christ as the only true salvation—these and similar ideas constitute his conception of Christianity, and have displaced every arbitrary element in his teaching. And with this loftier conception of the essence of the Christian religion, another factor co-operates to give ever-increasing power to his pulpit ministrations—viz., his growing knowledge of the world, and that deeper insight which comes from converse with human hearts. A close observer of character, he had learnt, with the skill of a practised physician, to read

the symptoms of spiritual disease, and to discern the subtle palliations and plausible disguises which often blind men to themselves. But that knowledge of mankind which makes some men cynical, only rendered him more tender and pitiful. At most, it gave to his preaching a certain flavour of moral pungency, a wholesome combination of the tenderness which refrains from rashly wounding, with the bold, blunt earnestness which never scruples to call sin by its proper name. Both in public and in private he could be gentle as a woman in dealing with the sorrowing and the penitent; but where faithful simplicity of admonition or rebuke was needed, he never, through false courtesy, failed to hit the mark. And in connection with this, I may be pardoned for adding, that in private life there was often observable in him that blending of humour with pathos, which in public the restraints of the pulpit kept out of sight. A certain aptitude in noting the contrasts of life, a quick eye for the grotesque and absurd in character and conduct, showed itself in the playful exaggerations, jocosities, quiet home-thrusts, with which his letters and his familiar

talk abounded. But, here as elsewhere, there was not in his wit the faintest tinge of malice ; and the weapons he could so deftly use in dealing with follies or absurdities, dropped from his hand the moment his deeper nature was touched by the sight of sorrow or sin.

Finally, the foregoing sketch of Dr Watson's character as a preacher would be still more inadequate than it is, if I did not add a single word as to that which in him was the basis of everything else—the ever-deepening religious element of his nature. Fervent piety has often redeemed from commonplace the teaching of men of slender intellectual gifts. In him it infused into his varied intellectual qualities a new inspiration and power. It is difficult sometimes to distinguish in clergymen between what is professional and what is real. In a vocation which implies perpetual dealing with sacred things, pious talk and solemnity of demeanour often mean very little. Even through the guise of professional sanctity, a worldly or selfish nature cannot help sometimes betraying itself ; but, as a rule, artificial restraints hinder such revelations, and natural tendencies are

kept in abeyance by the pressure of conventional propriety. But I believe there never lived one in whom it was less possible than in him of whom I speak, to separate the piety of the clergyman from the piety of the man. The most undiscerning listener could not fail to feel the impression of reality which breathed through every word he said. There was in his sermons nothing of the pedantry of the pulpit, and an absence of anything approaching to cant, and even of the phraseology associated in many minds with evangelical preaching. With instinctive delicacy, too, he shrank from those disclosures of personal "experience" which, even when they are honest, indicate effusiveness, if not coarseness, of nature, rather than deep religious feeling. Yet no one could be long in his presence without perceiving that he was one whose life was fed from the springs of genuine religious principle, and who lived in constant communion with God. And as, with advancing years, his own spiritual life deepened and his faith in spiritual realities became more profound, so did this source of his power as a preacher increase. He had not, and did not

aspire to; the graces of the orator; neither in matter nor manner was there in his sermons the slightest semblance of rhetorical effort; but men felt, as they listened to his quiet words, that he was one who had realised in his own experience what he preached, and that his was the nameless power over other hearts of one who deeply knew his own.¹

In the selection from Dr Watson's MSS. of the following sermons, I have been aided by another friend of his, on whose judgment I place more reliance than on my own. But, indeed, our task was an easy one. The sermons were written from week to week in the ordinary course of the author's ministrations; and the handwriting often indicates that they were written hastily. But there are in them no other signs of haste. Many others which we have examined are of almost equal merit to those which have been selected; and our difficulty was not what to choose, but what to omit.

¹ Some of the characteristics I have attempted to describe are reflected, even more fully than in the sermons, in the admirable "Address to the General Assembly" with which this volume closes.

I shall not attempt further to criticise them. Even were I otherwise competent for the task, my judgment in this case would be of little value. I have tried in vain to look at them from the point of view of the general reader, but the words on the written page have had for me a meaning beyond their literal significance, which they cannot have for other minds. Even the familiar handwriting has made it impossible to assume the attitude of the critic to the ideas it represents. Had the sermons been published in the author's lifetime, his own revision would, doubtless, have improved them both in matter and form. But literary success or failure would have cost him little thought; and those who reverence his memory may be content to know that the book will, at least, be welcomed and treasured by many as a precious memorial of a loved and revered pastor and friend.

J. C.

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW,

January 1883.

Christ's Authority, and the Way to Discern it.

“By what authority doest Thou these things, and who gave Thee this authority to do these things? And Jesus answered and said unto them, I will also ask of you one question, and answer me, and I will tell by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? answer me. And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; He will say, Why then did ye not believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; they feared the people: for all men counted John, that he was a prophet indeed. And they answered and said unto Jesus, We cannot tell. And Jesus answering, saith unto them, Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.”—MARK xi. 28-33.

THIS interview of the leading Jews with our Lord is in some respects very noteworthy. It brings before us persons whose religious influence was considerable, meeting and entering into an agreement with one another, to ask information from Jesus Christ, and again consulting together how to answer a question which He put to them. They ask of Him a question about Himself and His work, and He

withholds a satisfactory answer. They ask His authority for doing certain works which were very unusual. He had just driven out of the Temple courts those traffickers who had taken up a place within sacred ground; He had entered Jerusalem as one who was its king, and He had received Hosannas from the people. These probably were the things to which the priests, scribes, and elders particularly referred when they asked His authority for doing them. The many other things which He had done, and the many other words which He had spoken, were for the time out of their minds: the things here referred to were but a small part of His life; they took place in one day, and we know that hardly a day passed on which Jesus did not say or do something which had its effects on the hearts and minds of men.

These rulers had come to John the Baptist as they came to Jesus; but when they came to John and said, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" John answered at once and said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord." But Christ does not answer as John did: He gives an answer according to the character of those who came; and we shall see that the answer He gives is that which was best fitted to lead the rulers, if they had been in a right frame of mind, to the right conclusion. He does not

refuse to answer: He puts the matter conditionally; and their reply to His question will determine His reply to theirs.

The passage suggests one or two points which seem to me worthy of attention.

I shall look at it from two sides: (1) from the side of the questioners and their question; and (2) from the point of view suggested by Christ's reply to them. And we may perhaps find that whilst the interview between Christ and the rulers is in itself remarkable, it may take us also beyond the event itself, and may suggest to us truths and principles which are constantly coming into action in our own lives and in the lives of others.

I. "By what authority doest Thou these things, and who gave Thee this authority?"

Christ's power was a new power in the world at that time. It was felt, but not understood. Christ's authority was a different thing from the authority of the scribes and priests and elders. The Sanhedrim, or Supreme Council, which consisted of chief priests, elders (men of experience), and scribes (men learned in the sacred law), had an authority of its own. It was both a judicial body—in fact, the supreme court for trying various questions—and also a court of administration, which determined numerous matters of

detail. This Council had great authority—an authority which was held in high esteem. But during a time of popular excitement, its members were conscious that there were many things which it could not do. It could form an opinion on any question ; but there were questions on which, through fear of the people, it could not express the opinion it had formed. The Sanhedrim was quite within its sphere in declaring whether John the Baptist was a true teacher or not ; and in the same way it was quite entitled to test the claims of Jesus to be a teacher or a divine messenger to His nation. It is plain that its members did not believe that Jesus had any claims or authority at all ; and it is quite as evident that they had as little believed in the teaching or authority of John the Baptist—but *that* they had not ventured to say ! They had not exercised their authority in determining and declaring the character of John's mission ; they had left the people to find out for themselves : they had never pronounced on the claims of the Baptist at all ; they had acquiesced in silence in the conclusion at which the multitude had, of themselves, arrived ; or at least they had not ventured publicly to call in question the common belief which prevailed that John was a prophet.

This was the authority of the priests and scribes and elders who came to Jesus as He taught in

the Temple, and said to Him, "By what authority doest Thou these things, and who gave Thee this authority?"

Now this question, natural as it seems, and allowable, came too late for any good purpose. It is a question which ought to have been put much earlier, and which, if put earlier, might have been answered at once, and answered, too, by themselves. They had a right to put that question, it is true, but they were chargeable with negligence in not having settled it long before. They were Israel's shepherds, and they had a responsibility for the people over whom they were set. They were the watchmen of Israel, and they ought to have forewarned the city. They ought to have taken the lead in deciding Christ's claims, and in guiding the people to His presence; but they lingered behind: they waited until the question was decided for them. The people had already answered this question themselves, when the rulers were still in doubt how to answer it. Some of their number had proved exceptions. Joseph of Arimathea had answered it for himself; Nicodemus had asked earlier, and had been satisfied; but the rulers as a body had proved unequal to the task imposed on them. And in connection with this, we find that Jesus immediately afterwards spoke several parables touching the incapacity and unfaithfulness of the rulers.

Now the principle here involved is of wide application.

Year by year, and we may almost say day by day, there is some power or another growing up in society which in process of time will make itself felt, and which will gradually weaken and uproot all authority which is held in a wrong spirit and which is exercised in a wrong way. Human opinion, or call it human faith or conviction, is itself a living force, and when it is sown in the heart of mankind it rises and grows up, you know not how. And it has often made great way before its progress is observed. Christianity itself had taken a deep hold on the world before its followers had even got a name: it had begun to leaven the world, and to find its way into the homes of rich and poor, before the powers of the world had observed its advancement; and when they did at last begin to question it, and to say, By what authority dost thou exist, or who gave thee this authority to invade all the departments of human life? the time for putting the question was past. It had come and had grown up on *its own* authority; it had lived by its own inward vitality; it had taken possession of the minds and affections of mankind by a force which no earthly power could lend it, and of which no power on earth could wholly strip it.

Christianity began by appealing to the hearts of men, to what was in them, to what every man felt to be genuine and true. It began in Christ's own life and teaching, by His speaking to the people about what the people felt to be real and true. It seized on what was universal in man; it was not the religion of a class, or of a nation, or of a separate sect; it addressed itself to the reason and the conscience, and to the sympathies and feelings of the people. It pandered to no prejudices, it sought to build up nothing on a false or a temporary foundation. It came to men as they were, publican or Pharisee, ruler or peasant, fisherman or student; and it began with what all men had in common, and it adapted itself to what each man's thoughts and ideas had developed. Nor did it stop with satisfying his tastes, his wishes, his special habits. It rested not until it had brought every man, with his faults, his sorrows, his cravings, into the presence of God, into the light of the invisible world. It made each man ask the question, "What am I living for?" "What am I aiming at?" "What is the purpose of my acts and plans and desires?" and it arrested him in his course of living, and made him ashamed of his earthliness, his forgetfulness of God. So Christ's word took hold of men and drew them to Him. It touched the Samaritan woman at the well, and made her cry,

"Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did." She saw herself as she had never done before. Christ's word smote Peter and made him say, "Depart from me ; for I am a sinful man." It arrested Paul on his journey, and forced from him the question, "What wouldst Thou have me to do ?" The officers who were sent to take Christ returned without Him, saying, "Never man spake like this man." He had the words of eternal life : the penitent knew His voice and trusted Him ; the children felt safe in His arms ; the cured lunatic prayed Him that he might follow Him, feeling secure of peace in His society ; and by acts and words of mercy He caused men to say, "He speaks as one that has authority."

But to all these facts the priests and scribes and elders had been blind : having eyes, they saw not ; and having ears, they heard not, neither did they understand. And these questioners who came to Jesus Christ have their followers and imitators still. These are the men who can do nothing but by tradition and rule ; these are the men who set the form above the substance, who keep up the custom when the origin and the reason of the custom have passed away. These scribes and elders were men who would rather that the patient should die in accordance with certain regulations, than live contrary to the practice of their art and in defiance of all expect-

tations. They had unbounded faith in their own ancient laws and usages, and they could not understand how a greater law of human life should prevail: they measured everything by their own standard, and they could not conceive of any events which should force them to give place to a new power. All their life long they had been engaged about spiritual things; but for want of a true spiritual vision, they had been unobservant of their meaning. They were masters in Israel, yet they knew not the signs of the times nor the day of their visitation: they had slumbered whilst new forces were rising all around them; and they awoke to find that their traditions were void, their authority mistrusted, their influence gone.

As it was with Christ, so it is still with many—with all who live in His spirit, who seek to pass through life doing the will of God, and fulfilling His purpose for them on earth. There are men in the world who act their part, striving to raise the character of their generation and to do good. There are men in the world who strike out a course for themselves,—who look at what has to be done and do it, if not in the old way, in one which will accomplish the object. These and such as these do their work, and they leave it to critics and cavillers to settle as best they may by what power or authority their work is done.

II. We are prepared now to look at the passage before us from the other side—from the side of Jesus Christ: we are prepared to understand better how it was that He declined to give them at once a direct answer. It was not His custom to be silent when men wished to learn. He received Nicodemus by night; He reasoned with the Samaritan woman at the well when He was wearied with His journey, and when His lips were parched with thirst. And as He was ready at all times, so He had no respect of persons: Zaccheus or Simon the Pharisee, great or humble, it mattered not to Him. But there were times and circumstances when He performed no mighty work, and when He held His peace.

Christ says, "Neither tell I you;" but these words are not a mere resolution on His part to withhold from those who came to Him information as to His own place and position. Jesus Christ expresses here a fact which is true, whether He had been questioned or not; for the hindrance lay not in His being unwilling to tell, but quite as much in their being unable to receive what He might tell them. There were hindrances in their minds to the reception of the truth, and any answer which they might receive would fail to convey to them the full truth they professed to seek.

On another occasion the Jews came to Christ and said, "If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly;" and Christ's answer was, "I have told you before, and ye did not believe." In like manner the rulers had been virtually told before by what authority Christ had done these things. They had been told it in word; and even if no word to that effect had been spoken, the works themselves which He did, and the teaching itself which He gave, were a testimony that He had had sufficient authority. His works were His authority, His teaching was His authority. Just as the discovery of a principle in science is the authority for accepting it, as the discovery of a law of nature is the authority for following it, as the invention of a piece of mechanism is the authority for using it, as the healing power of a new medicine is the authority for applying it—so, one would think, there was no need to ask for the authority by which the sorrowful were comforted, or the ignorant taught, or the wicked reformed, or the worldly made spiritual. These works themselves showed whose authority they had. If you cannot see authority in an act of mercy or kindness, how can any words show it? If you cannot see the authority of a wise act, or of a true word, or of a good life, how can any assertions prove it? If a man is righteous, you do not ask him his authority for being

just; or benevolent, you do not question his authority for kindness of heart: and if a man, by reading the hearts and consciences of men, succeeds in producing in them a purer and better life, in calming the passionate, in changing the idle into the industrious, the intemperate into the sober, the unholy into the chaste and virtuous—these changes themselves are for you the assurance of an authority which no man may deny.

This want of power to see the truth and to know it, is the natural result of a spirit of unfaithfulness or untruthfulness to former light and to present convictions. I have said that Christ's words are not a mere expression of His unwillingness to tell His hearers what they ask; they are an expression of their unwillingness and incapacity to receive the information. And the one great hindrance to their receiving it lies in this—that they had been unfaithful to their former light and knowledge. It is a necessity, and not a mere penalty, for Christ to keep back the answer; they could not take it in. All through the spiritual life there runs this stern law—that if a man is unfaithful to the truth which he has learned, he loses the power to attain to more truth. The faculty of seeing the truth, and feeling it, becomes blunted by neglect; and the man who begins by shutting his eyes to the truth, ends by being blind to it: having loved

the darkness, he loses the power of admitting the light into his conscience and understanding. Unfaithfulness in little leads to unfaithfulness in much ; make a wrong use of what you have, and you must fail to make a right use of more if you receive it ; throw away your chances of improvement, and you throw away the very gifts of mind by which further improvement is possible.

Many people overlook this law of their spiritual being : they think that by neglect or carelessness, or even by something worse, they are, at the most, missing some advantage for a short season, and that when they please they can regain what has been lost. They forget that the loss is within—in the heart and soul, in the character and life—and that such a loss is irreparable. When they trample on conscience—when they, against their own inward convictions, commit wrong—they not merely defile their honour and bring on themselves shame, but they destroy the very powers of discerning right and wrong, truth and error. Each time that a man is unfaithful to the light within him, he is laying a thicker film upon the spiritual eye ; each time that a man leaves his gift unused, he not only casts away that opportunity for ever, but he allows the gift to waste by rusting. And if that process be continued day by day and year by year, the time

will surely come when he will put darkness for light and light for darkness.

But if it has its dark side, this great law has also a side of brighter hope. If we see how souls lose great profit by negligence, and by-and-by, by unfaithfulness, destroy their own capacities, this fact points to the way of recovery and restoration—it opens up a path to the great goal of truth and wisdom, where the soul may find rest and light. If a man really desires to know the truth, let him put in practice the truth he already has acquired. If a man has difficulties in religion, and longs to overcome them, he may attain his end in more ways than one. He may set his face steadfastly to the question and try to meet it; but side by side with this, he may carry into practice the knowledge and the faith he has already attained to. Is there anything at all in religion which is free of perplexity? Is there any point which you can say is for you really fixed? Do you believe anything at all? Then begin with that. Make that point a matter of living reality—act out your convictions upon it fully; and forasmuch as all knowledge and all faith are progressive, you will advance. You open your New Testament, and you stumble first at one thing, then at another. You have your doubts, now on this subject, now on that. You keep your

doubts to yourself, perhaps, but still you have them, and you are afraid to speak of them lest you should be set down for a sceptic or an unbeliever; and suffering these doubts to overshadow your faith, the sky grows darker, and soon the whole heaven within you and around you becomes black as night. But instead of sitting idle and doing nothing until you know all things, give full play to that amount of spiritual life and faith which you have. You do not understand all mysteries. No matter, you understand and believe some things which are simple and free from mystery; act out these convictions. You are perplexed about things which all Christendom nearly has accepted; and you say, "I cannot accept these as truth and fact." Well, what are you to do? Are you to reject everything and fall away into the ranks of the scoffing and the irreverent? No; not if you really wish to ascertain the truth. You believe, at least, that the Bible has for its grand end something which is neither base nor temporary—that it aims at raising man to fellowship with the unseen God. You believe, at least, that there is such a thing as sin and remorse and forgiveness; well, act as if you did believe that. You believe, at least, that Jesus was a man of benevolence, of love to others, of unselfishness, of honesty; well, act on that belief.

You believe that all falsehood and all impurity lead the conscience astray, and plunge the soul in darkness and misery; well, carry out those convictions, and light will arise. You believe in the goodness and power of God — in His eternal righteousness and truth; well, suffer not that faith to lie idle. Begin on facts which you admit; make them realities for yourselves, and I cannot but think that the mists will scatter, the day will break, the burden will roll away, and the face of truth will clear.

And as it is in religion, so will it be in everything else. Walk by the light you have, and more will come. It is marvellous how men with an honest love of the truth are guided into it, and are led out of the labyrinth of darkness and perplexities which surround them. In private life and in public life follow out those convictions at which you have carefully arrived. "Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule; and if in anything we be differently minded, God will reveal it unto us."

Life Eternal.

“And when He was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to Him, and asked Him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto Him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest : go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven : and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved : for he had great possessions.—MARK x. 17-22.

WHAT was the idea of eternal life which this young man had? What did he consider eternal life to be?

Now there may be some who suppose that such a question is easily settled, and that there is, or can be, only one sense in which the words “eternal life” can be understood. But that is not the case. The words, to many minds, convey the idea of some future period of existence, when this world shall have passed away and a new state of being shall have arisen. “Eternal

life" is understood by many to mean heaven—the heaven of the future—whatever that word may express to the hopes and faith of men. And if you suppose *that* to be the sense in which the words are used here, you will read the question of the young man as if he were asking Jesus Christ how he might at last, when life here was ended, enter into the blessedness of eternal life.

But it is by no means certain that this was his meaning, and it is still less certain that our Lord used or understood that expression in such a sense. I need not tell you that in recent times the doctrine of an eternal life beginning on the earth, and enjoyed on the earth, has been preached as it was not preached half a century ago, and that many Christians have now come to accept this use of the word as a good one, if not the only admissible one. In the lips of many of our most earnest and thoughtful men, "eternal life" means a particular kind of life, which even now, amid all the sufferings and changes of the world, fills the soul. In order to know, then, what a man means by the words "eternal life" even in our own day, you require to know more about him, and about his thoughts and ways of thinking. If you open a book, or enter into a church, and find the words "eternal life" used, you will soon see whether the meaning of the writer leads to the one thought or to the

other. You will find that in one place these words are wholly connected with the future, and that in another place they have to do with the present as well. According to one man's ideas, "eternal life" is something which has only been attained by good men who have passed away from the trials, and dangers, and sins of this our mortal state; something, therefore, which we too may attain when the body and soul are sundered. According to another man's ideas, "eternal life" is something which a good man finds, where he now is, on this earth, just as he finds peace of mind or a charitable spirit: just as he has on earth a life of activity, a life of love, a life of truth, a life of purity, a life of trust in God and in righteousness; so, such a teacher will tell you, a man may find here a life worthy to be called "eternal life." Nay, that eternal life, you will find, is explained to be just the life of a good man—the life of goodness, and peace, and love, and truth, and faith, in the soul. That, according to such a teacher, is "eternal life."

Which of these things, then, was the young man thinking of? Whether was he asking how he might enter into heaven after death, or how he might possess and keep eternal life in his heart on the earth? When I put the question in this shape, the answer to it, you will perceive, is not so easily settled.

A question of more importance still than the

young ruler's idea of life is, What was the thought of eternal life which Jesus Christ had in view? Was He speaking of the present or of the future, or of both? Were His thoughts and words concerning eternal life of such a kind that time was not a point in question so much as character? "This is the record," says St John (1 John v. 11)—"this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life." And again our Lord, in his prayer, John xvii. 2, 3, says: "As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him. And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."

The eternal life was the life that was in Him. You gather an idea of the life which is spoken of, in any case, from the specimen of it which is adduced. You speak of the life of poetry as seen in one man, of the life of science as seen in another, of the practical life of industry or benevolence as seen in a third; and when you read of the eternal life in Christ, you must consider His history and see what His life was. It was not a life of ease or quiet, or one free from trouble and suffering and care. But it was a life always manifested; a life visible in defeat as well as in power, in weakness as really as in honour; a life

of absolute submission to the will of His Father ; and a life which was full of wisdom, purity, gentleness, truth.

I think it is plain that, whatever was in the mind of Jesus Christ, the thoughts of this young ruler had not risen quite so high as this. And possibly there may have been in his mind a thought which he could not have explained fully to himself respecting this eternal life which he wished to inherit. I regard his state of mind as one full of deep interest. He was a man who had shunned every vice and form of folly as it was known in society. He had been guilty of no offences against the law of God, and he had gained the esteem of his friends. "Jesus," we read, "beholding him, loved him;" and so doubtless did others. I take his own words as true, so far as they go; and Jesus does not contradict them. Yet for all this, the young ruler had not found eternal life. There was something wanting. He felt there was, and he put the question, "What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" He could not have put the question to one better fitted to deal with him, or with a state of mind like his. Christ's answer probed the young ruler's heart to the bottom. It met his case. "What lack I yet?" he had said—not, as I take it, in the spirit of vanity or pride, but in the spirit of a man who was not sure where his

deficiency lay—"what lack I yet?" he said, sincerely wishing to know wherein he might approach nearer to the standard of perfection, and thus attain the eternal life of which he was in search. And the answer of Christ shows that He discerns at once where the fault lies. It reminds one of a skilful physician who listens to the complaint of a patient telling him of some weakness and want of proper energy, but not knowing from what it springs; and at once the physician touches some muscle, puts his finger on a tender spot which had been unsuspected, presses it, and says, "Your disease is there." The patient starts: he had never felt pain there—never until it was touched by that hand; but at once he knows that the physician is right, that he has all along been living in ignorance of the nature of his malady, and perhaps by his habits he has been feeding it. So this young ruler feels at once that Christ is right, but he cannot all at once make up his mind to the consequences. He has power to do much—power to part with much, power to restrain his hand and his heart from much; but here is a tenderness he had never dreamt of, a diseased organ which hinders the current of his life, and he cannot suffer it to be removed. He has come up to the very gate of the kingdom, but he cannot take the last step and enter in. He carries a burden which he must either

take in with him or lay down. But in *it* cannot go, for he must enter by himself, loving life, loving the kingdom, loving God above all else. And as he cannot carry his burden in, so neither can he muster courage to lay it down. And if for a moment he hesitates what to do, it is only for a moment; his mind is for the time made up, and he goes away grieved. He goes away—he who was so near, who had come so close to the kingdom that he saw within: he goes away. He had but one step more to take, one act more to do, and then he would have found out that the kingdom was not attained by his own merits or worth; but he would have found, after all, that eternal life was the gift of God.

There was a similar crisis afterwards in the life of St Paul. According to his own account, his experience resembled the experience of this young ruler who came to consult Christ. “Touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Philip. iii. 6). “The commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death” (Rom. vii. 10). “The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ” (Gal. iii. 24). He was in search of eternal life, and he was for ever questioning with himself, what good thing shall I do that I may have it? But with all he did, there was something undone: in all he strove

to do, he found that his soul could not rest ; and he learned that eternal life was not a prize which he could earn by works, but that it was a power in itself to begin and finish all works. All spiritual life begins in the acceptance of that place which God gives us, as sons of God ; it lies deeper than any mere outward act of obedience or sacrifice. " Though I give all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned," it profiteth nothing. And so, doubtless, this ruler would have learned ; so, perhaps, he did afterwards learn, although his history for us closes here, and the last sight we have of him is as we see him departing from the presence of Christ, grieved at the harsh conditions of obtaining eternal life. He did not remain long enough to learn the lesson Christ was teaching.

Two things we have to avoid in interpreting these words. There is a danger lest, while trying to explain the words of Christ, we should seem to be explaining them away ; and, on the other hand, there is a danger lest, by applying them to every case alike, we should make the Gospel, what it is not, a mere system of communism, or of purchase with certain outlays. It would be explaining away Christ's words if I were to say that they meant nothing for us, and that they had no reference to our use of our property, and to the hindrance which wealth offered to

the kingdom of God in the hearts of men. And again, I would be misleading others if I gave them to understand that the message of Christ to all persons who are rich was, that at once they should rid themselves of their riches and become poor like the poorest. In both cases men would hear my words with a sense of distrust; for every reader of this narrative must be persuaded that Christ's warning to the rich had some meaning—that it had a meaning fitted to awaken the deepest concern in every heart; and yet every reader of this narrative is conscious that it never was Christ's intention to declare, to every man of property, that the only condition of entering into life was to give his property away to others, and leave himself with nothing.

There was a meaning in Christ's words to the young ruler, which he did not miss. Too well he knew it. It came home to his understanding; it smote him to the heart. Christ's words to him had but one message for him, "Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor." He could put no other interpretation on them but one; and that one interpretation was enough to crush him, and to send him away a sad and a disappointed man, for he had great possessions. To lose everything is a calamity which thousands have endured, and some have borne it with a courage and a manliness which have raised them

in the estimation of all who knew them. It is a calamity which has overwhelmed others, and from which they have never recovered. There are thousands of men and women who have, without their own consent, been deprived of their possessions, and left with no treasure save what they had in heaven. Their reverse has come to them when they were ill fitted to bear it, and they have not had the satisfaction, perhaps, of thinking that their property fell into the hands of the poor. All they know is, that their worldly fortune has perished, and they have been left empty. Had the command come to them as it came from the lips of Jesus Christ, they would doubtless, in most cases, have received it as this young ruler received it, and gone away sad; but the stroke has fallen on them like a law of nature, and they have had no more power to resist it than to resist a torrent or an earthquake. They have met their fate; and some of them have met it calmly, bowing their head like the old patriarch Job, and saying, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." Yes, in the case of many, the truth has been fulfilled that they had to part with all that they had before they entered into the kingdom of God. They have entered that kingdom through losses and sufferings and sacrifices, not of property only, but of possessions infinitely more precious.

The disciples, by their question, showed that they understood our Lord's words to have a far wider reference than merely to men of great wealth. "Great wealth" is an expression which has a different meaning in every class of society and in every generation of men. Amongst the poor, a man who is freed from the necessity of earning his livelihood is accounted a rich man. In the last generation, men who could retire from business on what is now deemed a very moderate fortune, were accounted by their neighbours rich. There is no absolute standard of wealth. And as a man's means increase, this standard rises; and to-day he looks with contempt on what he once regarded with envy and admiration.

The question, "What did our Lord mean by riches and a rich man?" is not to be answered by casting up a man's possessions and stating their amount. One man who has comparatively little may find his riches a hindrance and a snare; another may have great estates, and his mind may dwell but little on them. Money, and land, and fortune tell on men in different ways. In the case of one man you may say, "His money belongs to him;" he is its master—can use it, spend it, give it away, and remain as he was before. In the case of another man, you may say, "He belongs to his money;" it is his master—he is a slave to it. He dare not use it as he pleases. He cannot, for his

life, make it less, or use it freely, or bestow it on good purposes. It holds him in bondage. If it were to depart, he would die; if it remains, all is well: and it is not so much he who possesses the money as the money that possesses him.

It is useless, then, to ask, what is the riches which hinder a man from entering the kingdom of God, or who is the rich man, for each man is rich to the one below him in wealth? But it is not useless to ask, what is that state of mind which riches may affect and injure? Love of the world, in the Scripture sense of the term, is the snare and the hindrance; and you may find that in every human heart. And so our Lord's disciples inquire, "Who then can be saved?" *They* feel that even in that circle where everything was abandoned, boats and houses, and lands and friends, the worldly spirit might linger. There might be a love of the world even there strong enough to hinder the soul from finding its true portion in what Christ calls the treasure in heaven. A man may have very little—may be, in the estimation of many, by no means rich—yet, in the sense of the words used by Christ, he may be a rich man, hindered and hurt by his wealth, and because of the place his wealth, great or little, has in his mind. Yet, with all these limitations and explanations, it must not be forgotten that, even in the popular meaning of the term

“rich,” the text has a truth in it; and the more a man receives of the abundance of the world, the more sure is he that he ought to be on his guard against the snares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches.

I do not think that any one of us dare come in Christ’s room, to direct the conscience, and constrain men to outward acts, in order to obtain eternal life. I do not think it is either possible or desirable. To me it seems a far higher aim in Christian teaching to help men to come in contact with Christ’s words, and to apply them to themselves with intelligence and freedom. I would count it a poor result, in the Christian Church, if all that was gained by her efforts amongst mankind were to persuade men to give up their property for religious and charitable uses: *that* might not be life eternal. The guidance of the conscience in religious matters may be hurtful, even when the conscience is guided to the right issue; for what is gained in one way is more than lost in another. You gain in material results, perhaps, but you lose in spiritual. You gain an object, but it is at the expense of that freedom and spirituality which are the life of every conscience, and without which man is but a piece of mechanism.

I am not here, then, to say to one man, If you would have eternal life, you must do this: and to another, You must do that; rather am I disposed to

ask every one to read this narrative with care and thoughtfulness, and to press home to every conscience the infinite need of having, as the first and foremost possession, eternal life. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." Fellowship and sympathy with God in all His divine works; the same mind that was in Christ; the spirit of confidence, of charity, of peace—the spirit of one who makes God's will his law and life,—this is surely the highest possession which a human being can attain. And if amongst us there is a hindrance to this—if by avarice, or worldliness, or anything else in the world, we are shutting out this spirit and this life—it is not a harsh command, but one founded on reason and on truth, if we say, "Lose it, part with it at once, rather than obstruct the growth in your souls of that which is Godlike and eternal." If all men cannot receive this saying, he that is able to receive it let him receive it.

*The Principle by which Men
shall be Judged.*

“When saw we Thee an hungered, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee? Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”—MATTHEW XXV. 37-40.

THESE verses close the public ministry of Jesus Christ, as recorded in this Gospel. Only one further incident is recorded, which adds to the teaching in this chapter in a very remarkable way. The great moral and spiritual lesson here is the *identity* of Christ and His brethren; but in the one further event recorded by the evangelist before his public ministry closed, the other side of the truth is shown, and the point of *difference* between him and his brethren is brought out. The lesson of that event is expressed in our Lord's words, “She hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.” I have more

than once spoken of the mistake of looking for everything in any special parable or discourse ; and I notice this matter here, at the outset, to show that whilst we are to read the teaching of Christ in this passage (chap. xxv.) with great thoughtfulness, we are not to regard it as exhaustive, or as conveying every separate form of divine truth.

In this chapter we have three distinct parables or incidents set forth to express the great truth which Christ is placing before men's minds in regard to the future. In the opening of the chapter there is the parable of the Ten Virgins ; then the parable of the Talents ; and here a narrative rather than a parable, based upon the image of a shepherd dividing the sheep and goats of his flock. Each of these refers to the same great event—the separation of the good and evil in a coming day ; but each of these also gives a different aspect of the truth.

In the parable of the Ten Virgins the kingdom of heaven is regarded in general as the whole body of believers. In the parable of the Talents, reference is specially made to those who *have opportunity and office*. In the narrative before us there is a wider range of judgment : we are no longer within the official circle of servants and stewards of the great Lord, nor even within the larger boundary of ordinary believers. In those striking words which I have read this

morning, Jesus Christ is not discoursing, as previously, of the kingdom of heaven, as we usually understand that phrase. He represents Himself as not only the Head of the kingdom of God, but as the Judge and Lord of those who have never heard of the kingdom, and have never, so far as they knew, lived within its borders. In this closing section of these discourses on the latter time, Christ is speaking of "all nations" of the earth. In the Bible that expression is for the most part used to mean the vast body of human beings outside of the covenant people of Israel; and when we read of the nations or Gentiles, we think of them as men and races, apart from their position in the religious world. And here I cannot doubt the words of Jesus refer to all those portions of the world placed outside and beyond the pale of what we usually understand by Christendom or the kingdom of heaven. "Before Him shall be gathered all nations."

Every reader of this event has been struck by one circumstance which comes out in the judgment as here described; and that is the surprise on the part of those who are approved and those who are condemned. "When saw we Thee an hungered, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink?" say those whom the Judge approves. And, in like manner, in reply to the sentence of condemnation,

those whom He addresses say, "When saw we Thee an hungered, or athirst, and did not minister unto Thee?" In both cases there is manifested the utmost astonishment. But all this is perfectly natural, if we remember that Christ is not speaking of His own followers only and of those who have received the knowledge of the kingdom of God; but of "all nations," of all men, of all periods of history, and of human life before Christ and after Christ, in the heathen as well as in the Christian world, for Christ is representing Himself as the Universal Judge. And all this section of Christ's teaching is in harmony with what St Paul says in Romans ii.: God "will render to every man according to his deeds. . . . As many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law. . . . For when the Gentiles do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves." In this portion of Christ's teaching (xxv.), we have the judgment of the Gentiles or of the nations. They have not known or seen Christ, they have had no thought of Him in their conduct or actions; but, for all that, they have had another law in their hearts, and by that inner law and light they are tried. This circumstance, then, which strikes every reader—viz., the surprise of those who are assembled before the Judge and King of all the

earth—when they hear His name mentioned and His own person spoken of, is accounted for by the fact that the judgment of all human actions extends far beyond the region of the kingdom of God as it is known on the earth; and takes in all times, all races, all men, even such as have not known of the existence or history of Jesus Christ. And so, when commended, as the good are, for having been generous and dutiful to Christ, they are surprised; for they have never seen Him, never helped Him, never done anything for Him or in His name, and yet they get the credit of having been His personal friends in trouble.

Observe then how Christ identifies Himself with men, and how He sees the spirit of His own Gospel everywhere, even in places and in lives which seem to have been total strangers to Him.

I. Christ's identifying of Himself with men. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." All kindly actions done to His brethren are regarded as done to Him; and all neglect or unkindness shown to them is regarded as having been shown to Himself.

The question arises, who are Christ's brethren to whom these acts are done, and which are counted as having been done to Him? And the first and

natural reply will be that they are humble afflicted Christians, who have the name as well as the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and who in this way are His representatives, so that good done to them is held as having been done to Him. And so far the answer may be accepted as correct. But whilst it is the truth, it is not the whole truth on this matter; and I think we may regard the brethren of Jesus Christ as embracing many in whom no likeness to Jesus Christ has been found or recognised. I am disposed to accept that wider explanation because, as I said, the very structure of the story implies that those who are judged may never have seen or heard of Jesus Christ, and were wholly unconscious of doing Him a benefit when they were aiding His brethren. Himself they did not know, and as little could they know those who were His. They had never seen Him, and therefore they could not know or discern His image in those whom they had helped in straits and trials.

And, moreover, it is necessary to give a wider meaning to the word brethren than merely to apply it to those who had been known as Christ's followers and brethren; because that would introduce into all kindly and benevolent actions an element of uncertainty and doubt. If Christ recognises none as His brethren except those who deserve the place, and if this unfolding of judgment is to be the guide of our actions,

it would follow that, before doing anything as unto Him, we should require to settle the question with ourselves whether the individual to whom we are disposed to show kindness is a true member of Christ's house and a true brother or sister of Christ's family. And then would come in the old question which long ago tended to harden the hearts of the Jews who had the law of God in their hands. When Christ said, "Love thy neighbour as thyself," the ready reply was at hand, "And who is my neighbour?" and the love of the heart was withheld until that point was settled. So here, if we are not to assist the hungry or the thirsty, the sick or the naked, until we ascertain who the brethren of Christ are who need assistance in their hunger and sickness and poverty, we shall withhold our help until we have satisfied ourselves that we have decided correctly a question which lies outside of human judgment, and can only be known with certainty to Him who sees the heart. Such a process, instead of opening the heart and affections of men, would only sear and harden the spirit, and under cover of doing service as to Christ, would lead to nothing higher and better than narrow and uncharitable judgments. No, we must interpret the words "one of the least of these my brethren" in the largest and widest sense, and not suppose that the reward of a good action will be

withheld because there was a mistake in regard to the individual to whom it was done, or that condemnation for a life of neglect and cold-heartedness will be escaped because those whom we treated with harshness or indifference were not of Christ's family and household. The spirit of kindness and pity is not bound up and confined by the knowledge we have that this man or that is one of Christ's brethren. If we do know that he is, all the more ought we to treat him with respect and benevolence; but the spirit which Christ commends was a spirit which did not know the brethren any more than it knew Him, the elder brother Himself. And, on the other hand, you can conceive it possible that a still more subtle reply should be given by those who are accused of neglecting Christ in His sorrow and imprisonment: "Lord, I never knew Thy brethren; I did not know that they were Thine, or I would have helped them in their necessities." No, we must take the words in their widest sense, and regard Christ as acknowledging as His brethren many men whom nobody ever acknowledged before. Oh, how often the heart of men is ready to whisper apologies for neglect and wrong, on the ground that they were not sure that it was the true brethren of Christ who were in want and misery, and therefore there was the less harm done. But Christ takes all actions of a moral nature

out of the region of uncertainties; and every good work done is judged, not by the worth of the individual on whose behalf it was wrought, but by the character and the spirit in which it was rendered. "One of the least of these my brethren," may turn out to have been one who never merited that place and that name, and the good action which was done shall not be marred by such a misfortune; nor shall the evil actions done, or the good actions left undone, be justified by the fact that, as things are, the individual injured or neglected had no personal claim to be regarded as one of Christ's brethren. Just, then, as the question "Who is my neighbour?" was put of old to evade the command of Christ, "Love thy neighbour;" so may this question, "Who are Christ's brethren?" be put to turn off the edge of the sentence, "Inasmuch as ye have not done it unto one of the least of these, ye did it not to me." As, in the first case, the neighbourly spirit in the Samaritan found out and determined who was his neighbour—for a man with a neighbourly spirit will never be at a loss to discover his neighbour, he will soon find a neighbour to love, a neighbour to assist,—so the man with the spirit of Christ in him, and with the spirit of Christ's brethren, will soon find out the least of the brethren of Christ, to whom he may minister in kindness and generosity.

The question then is not "Who are Christ's brethren that I may aid them?" but "Have I in my heart the same mind that was in Him?" and then the question answers itself—it has been already answered. The brethren of Christ are all around us, but we shall not recognise them as such until we see and have the brotherly spirit within us. That brotherly spirit will open our eyes and work marvels in us. On the child rescued from disease and suffering and crime, Christ lays His hand, and says, "One of the least of these my brethren." The poor, the out-cast, the fallen, the blind, the dumb, the sick, the lonely, when these are searched out and reached and aided, to these Christ turns and says, "One of the least of these my brethren." Everybody does not aid the same individual or the same class of individuals. Everybody does not minister to the sick, or to the prisoner, or to the hungry, but everybody has at least one, some have many, channels in which their sympathy flows. And in a world where the poor are always with us, and where the orphan and the helpless are ever found, and where the cry of suffering rises from some heart and home daily, there is room for every type of kindness to find expression,—room for every spirit of tenderness and compassion to gain its appropriate sphere.

II. I have in some measure anticipated what may be said on the second point in these words—viz., that our Lord is giving an outline of the principles of judgment by which men shall be tried who do not know and have not known or seen Him. I have spoken of His identifying Himself with His brethren, and of accepting what was done to them as if it had been done to Himself. But such a connection between Him and them is not a mere arbitrary thing—it is founded in nature and in fact; and Jesus here shows that, even where there was ignorance of Him and of His truth, there was enough to prove what men were. And when Christ says, “Inasmuch as ye have done it,” He shows how the spirit of His religion might be found in germ and in reality where a knowledge of His religion could not exist. The righteous man has always existed—I do not speak, of course, of the highest form of righteousness; but in all ages of the world there have been men who tried to live a good and noble life, and whose life was full of good and noble deeds; and these men, having no law, were, as St Paul says, “a law unto themselves, showing the work of the law written in their hearts.” The highest form of character and righteousness which they knew, they obeyed and followed; the law written in their hearts they kept; the light which was granted to them they

used and walked in it, and higher than that they could not go. They were, as the Confession of our Church declares, "incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word;" but that incapacity is not an absolute bar to their salvation: and our Lord declares that many shall come from the east and from the west, and from the north and south, and enter into the kingdom of God, whilst others who thought they were surer of it shall be left out.

What our Lord here teaches is, that in all nations and in all ages there are circumstances which are sufficient to test and prove the character of men; and also, that in the lives of both good and bad men in all nations, there are incidents enough to show what manner of spirit is in them. He that is faithful in the least will be faithful in the greatest, and he that is unfaithful in the least unfaithful in the greatest. St John says, "If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" and he also says, "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." And that is Christ's teaching here. I do not complicate it by other doctrines or by other precepts. I do not say that this is all that is needed to make the Christian life complete. I think it enough to deal with one subject at a time, and so I confine my remarks to what seems

to me the principle which our Lord lays down in regard to the decision and judgment of human character and life in those who have not come under the outward call of His kingdom. Further in matters so solemn I do not go. I would not attempt to lift a veil He has not drawn aside, or to determine matters He has left undetermined. It is enough that in the humblest and commonest matters of our daily and human life there are proofs enough of what spirit men are of.

I do not know any thought more worthy our study and consideration than this. I do not know anything at once so plain and so deep,—so plain that every human being who knows the difference between right and wrong, between kindness and cruelty, may determine it; and yet so profound that the wisest man may find grave subject for reflection in all its various bearings on human life. Jesus Christ here tears asunder every false covering under which men claim to be accounted religious or righteous, when there is wanting the simplest form of righteousness. Jesus Christ, in these words which I have read, tells us in language we cannot mistake, that “he that doeth righteousness is righteous.” He tells us in a simile which no one who has ever read the story can forget, that if we leave out the commonest and everyday calls on our mercy and kindness, on our thought and care,

we can make no pretensions to be the sheep of His pasture, or members of His kingdom. Great duties may not be open to all; great opportunities are vouchsafed only to a few; but go where you will, and in the least favoured spot of the world, you will find the opportunity of opening your heart, of saying a word of comfort, of tendering, of doing an act of sympathy, — and so, of giving evidence whether the spirit of Him who thought of others and pleased not Himself is in your heart or not. There are many great sins which we have cause to dread, but there are sins not apparently so great which we may have much more cause to dread; and one of them is here held up before us by Jesus Christ. And that one sin—the greatest in one sense, but in another so small that many hardly see it—is the slow process of self-hardening which goes on in a cold, unloving, selfish heart. Let us mark it well. The Lord's public ministry closes with a warning, not against some glaring evil which brings down the universal curses of mankind, but with a deep and solemn warning against the selfish indifference to the wants, and necessities, and sufferings, and wrongs which the world is full of. To see wrong, and have no desire to right it; to see suffering and misery and ignorance, and to stretch forth no hand to soothe it; to be in the presence of sorrow, and to forbear to sympathise with it; in short, to

leave things alone, and to let the weak, the ill-used, the uncared for, get help where they may, and, so far as we are concerned, to allow the world of misery and wrong to take its course, as if it were no care of ours,—this is the last sin Christ condemns: against this is spoken the final warning of Jesus Christ in His public ministry. For under all this the most serious evil that can overtake the human spirit may be taking root; and the soul, the living part of the man, all unseen and unthought of, may be slowly but surely consuming within, eaten up by the canker of indifference, and by insensible degrees passing into spiritual death. Against such an issue let us strive and pray, that we may be kept in living fellowship with the God of all consolation and mercy.

Called, but not Chosen.

“Many are called, but few are chosen.”—MATTHEW xxii. 14.

THERE are two points in this parable on which I wish to say a few words. In one respect they are different, but in another respect they are alike, and indeed are really one and the same; and they may be best described by the one phrase—religious indifference. This one subject, as I have called it, comes out in a twofold form: first, in v. 5, “They made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise;” and secondly, in v. 12, “Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” These two forms of religious indifference are both comprehended under one common utterance, the words with which the parable closes—“Many are called, but few are chosen.” If I were to take these words by themselves, and separate them from the context, it would seem as if they led me into a very abstruse and speculative inquiry. “Many are called, but few are chosen,” is a text that at first sight seems to point far above all human pur-

poses and actions; it seems to take us from earth to heaven, from man to God, from the present to the past, from the daily work and duty of life to the secret and eternal counsels with which daily life cannot interfere. But it is sometimes a dangerous thing to separate words and sentences from the place where they are found. Everybody remembers the story, two thousand years old, of the foolish person who, having a house to dispose of, carried a brick or stone of it in his hand to show what the house was like; and sometimes one finds phrases and paragraphs of the Bible wrenched out from their proper position in the Scriptures, and exhibited to the world as a specimen of what the contents of the Bible are. Such a plan does violence to the compactness and connectedness of the truths of Scripture. And in the present case, if I were to use this text for the purpose of proving the doctrine of foreordination or predestination, the sound of the words would seem to be wholly in my favour; but the moment any one came to examine the matter closely, and to see what it was they were meant to express, it would be found that the sense of the words was against my interpretation.

I have preached more than once on the subject of predestination as I think it is taught, and I have, in so doing, endeavoured to show how it was a doctrine rooted in truth and in human life. But it is one

thing to teach a truth or doctrine, and it is another thing to adduce proofs of that truth or doctrine which are not proofs of it at all. And when one reads this parable carefully, and sees the conduct of those who were invited to the wedding-feast of the king's son, one sees that what Christ means by being "chosen" was not chosen beforehand, but chosen after trial. Christ is using the word as it is used by us every day in our intercourse with one another. As when various specimens of seeds, patterns, designs, are submitted to your inspection, all are not chosen which are sent; but only those are chosen which are found to stand the test, and to be worthy. But when you say, "I have chosen a few out of the many," you do not mean that you had first chosen and then examined, but first examined and tried, and then chosen. If we read these words, and wish to understand them, we must first read the parable, and then in the light of the parable read the words. Few were chosen finally, because only some out of many stood the proper test.

The parable is divided into two sections, and in each section we find an instance of the many called and few chosen. In the first case, many are invited, and few appear at the marriage-feast: none, indeed, accept of the invitation at all when the time of the feast arrives. They made light of it, and went their

ways: one to his farm, and another to his merchandise, and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. They had really refused to be guests, and one may say that the choice lay with them. And so in a measure it did; but the king could truly say for all that, "They which were bidden were not worthy; they have proved unfit;" and as they had rejected the invitation, they were rejected in turn. They were called, but after all they were not chosen. That is the first section of the story; and we find an instance of calling and rejection in the second section too. When the room was filled, one might say that now all are not only called but chosen; and yet it is not so. One of that number appears without the proper garment which, on such occasions, was provided for the guests; and he, though he is called, and comes nearer to the feast than any one who had refused to appear, is cast out. He is called, but not chosen. The two sections of the story, differing as they do in some respects, are at one in this point, that both of them bring out cases of great and wilful indifference and neglect. In both parts one sees how the highest opportunities may not bring the highest blessings.

In the outside form of the story there is something in each of these cases very unlike anything that could happen among ourselves; but that arises from

the fact that our customs at social and festive meetings are not now what they once were. It was customary to give a double invitation—one when the feast was resolved on, and a second when the day for holding it arrived; and that explains the words, “tell them that all things are ready.” The indifference displayed by the guests is all the greater when it is the second invitation they make light of.

It was also a custom on certain occasions to provide a suitable dress in which the guests might appear. One instance of this sort we find in the Old Testament (2 Kings x. 22), where, at a sacrifice and feast, Jehu gives orders, “Bring forth vestments for all the worshippers of Baal.” But whether it was a common custom or not, there were times when the custom was observed; and at such times the want of the dress was as much a proof of indifference as the refusal to come. You can understand the nature of the insult which it was to the king who invited them, by considering the social customs of our own day, where respect and contempt may be shown by what men put on, as well as by what they say and do. And so in this second section of the story one sees how, through their own fault, many who were called might not in the end be chosen.

The two parts of the parable, as I said, teach the same thing. They turn our thoughts to one common

cause of rejection ; and that cause is indifference—indifference to the place to which God calls us—indifference to the privilege or advantage which, in the providence of God, is within our reach.

I do not call it a religious indifference, or a spiritual indifference, or a moral indifference, because the want of a serious earnest spirit, no matter whether it be in the things of religious worship or common life, is a spiritual fault. In the case of those to whom the parable was first spoken, the indifference was one regarding national advantages,—it was a failure to understand the true position of the nation towards God and towards the world. It reminds us somewhat of the case elsewhere spoken of, that of the husbandmen in the vineyard, but with this difference, that whereas the wicked husbandmen supposed the vineyard to be their own, when they were merely tenants, the guests in this parable treat the whole matter with contempt ; and in this they represent those who despise their national privileges, and concern themselves only with their own individual gains. In the second section of the story, which refers more to the whole world than to one particular nation, the indifference or contempt which is shown is more of a directly personal and religious kind. The nation has passed away, the city has been destroyed, and many nations and many cities have come in its room.

The first invited guests have perished as rebels, and the servants of the great king have returned from their world-wide errand of invitation, and have introduced a new band of guests, taken from the world's highways; and now it is not a national so much as a personal and a religious honour which they have in common with thousands out of every kingdom and nation on earth. Here one would have expected greater earnestness and greater attention to the great purpose of the kingdom of God. But in this second part of the story we see the same spirit of moral indifference creeping in. We must look through the outward form to the inward meaning of the parable; for the outward form is only the framework of the truth which is taught us. Under the form of contempt and indifference towards a king, and neglect of the ordinary courtesies of life, what the parable points to is the indifference of men towards the relation in which they stand to God.

Our Lord's words are directed in each case, both in the first and second parts of the parable, against the spirit of easy selfishness which despises all the great and deeply important facts of our human life, and leaves them all aside for other ends, which are entirely secondary and unworthy. Jesus calls us in these words to the highest and most important purposes of life; and it is well to look at them, and to

look at them in such a way as not to mistake His meaning.

We cannot interpret His words merely by the letter. It would be a mistake, for instance, to suppose that the purpose, the great purpose, of human life, or of the kingdom of God, was something which implied that a man could not both fulfil it and busy himself with agriculture or merchandise, or any other enterprise which his earthly calling involves. In the parable, every man must choose one thing or another. He could not both be present at the feast and be at his ordinary task in the world. But in the kingdom of God we do not interpret this by the letter: a man may at the same moment fulfil his everyday task and not neglect his most important work as a servant of God; and he may, as a guest and invited friend, enjoy to the full the blessings of God's kingdom without giving up his pursuit of everyday duty. Indeed, if the teaching of the New Testament is what we have been wont to consider it to be, the real fulfilling of the place we have in God's kingdom may be best seen by the way in which we fulfil the ordinary duties and cares of life.

I think we all understand this. But we may not all feel that, whilst diligence and thrift and industry are Christian duties, there are other duties which may

be overlooked in the meantime. And what are these? They are the duties which concern our own life as men, as citizens, as Christians, as bound to God and to the Church and to the world by other ties than mere profit and loss, labour and rest, competition and rivalry.

“The kingdom of God,” says St Paul, “is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” The kingdom of God, which is here set forth under the image of a marriage-feast, is a sphere wherein provision is made for the higher nature of man—not for his intellect and tastes only, but for his inner life, his affections, his sympathies, his benevolence, his devotion towards God, for what is spiritual and in his heart. The life is more than the meat, the body than the raiment, the heart than the head, the soul, that is the man, than all. What is the character, what are the thoughts, what is the tone of a man’s life—that is the man, that fixes his place in the kingdom of God, that is his highest nature, and for that all things else, if they come in the way of it, are to be sacrificed; and indifference in this region of life is the great hindrance to spiritual wellbeing. Neglect in this department of life is the greatest contempt one can offer to God.

And here the words of the parable may find a

common illustration. One may see that the higher and more important parts of human life are often sacrificed to the lower. Yet just think of the different impressions which are made upon men's minds by the sight of one man who neglects his business, and by the sight of another man who neglects himself—his own true self, not his lower and carnal, but his higher and spiritual self! All the world expects to find a man in earnest at his business; and if he neglects it, and suffers it to run to ruin, he is condemned as a madman or a fool. But if, in the prosecution of his business, his own inner and better self suffers injury, how few appreciate the mischief which he has wrought through his own neglect! Yet, if we will only think of it, the folly of the man who suffers his affairs to get into confusion is as nothing to the folly of the man who allows his own spiritual nature and life to deteriorate. All would condemn, and justly condemn, the man who makes light of his opportunities to transact the serious business of life. You have condemned such men in every profession; you have fretted to see a man with good land fail to make the best of it; you have been inwardly indignant, even when it was no business of your own, to see men who might have developed a good trade, or availed themselves of some favourable opening, fritter away their chances, and

lose for ever an opportunity which will never return. And yet other men, who have caught the tide, and run with it to prosperity and wealth, have lost something far more precious, and nobody sympathises with them, nor do they feel sorrow for themselves.

If it were possible for men to be guilty of the same indifference in the secondary affairs of life which they exhibit in the higher, they would bring on themselves derision and scorn. If you were to allow the entrance to a harbour to silt up, and so to debar yourselves from all communication with the open sea through sheer thoughtlessness, there would not be language strong enough in the commercial world to express the amazement and contempt with which such apathy would be regarded. And yet consider,—think how, in a man's own inner spirit, there is something akin to this, but really far more serious so far as he himself is concerned, and neither he nor any one else takes notice of it. The access to his soul, to his affection, to his conscience, to his better impulses, may be choked; the man himself—not his means or farm or profits, but the man himself—may be injured, and he is hardly aware of it. But if we would only think, how much greater is the injury. His feelings have been growing rougher, his nature harder, his sympathies more blunted; his generosity may have

been worked out, his spirit may have been growing more earthly, his piety fast ebbing away, his fitness for the kingdom of God here and hereafter may have been growing less and less, until there is hardly a trace of connection between him and a spiritual life. God may not be in all his thoughts, and the life of God may be something to him almost wholly strange. That is a calamity, and yet the calamity strikes neither himself nor any other.

Does it not strike any other? Is there here in the words of Christ anything to tell us that in God's eye the man has been, with all his shrewdness, a fool; with all his wealth, a beggar; with all his surroundings, mean and naked? The man himself is in God's eyes greater than all the man has or can secure; and neglect or indifference to what is first and greatest in the man is worse than neglect or indifference to what is lowest and least worthy. What is the untilled land, or the misused machinery, or the rivers and harbours with their channels clogged and full, in comparison with the human soul with its gates shut, its throbbing heart stopped, its vision of God and heaven darkened? Can you compare the two? If you condemn the man who makes light of all business contracts, and regards trade and bargains and payments as a jest, to be attended to or not as suits the whim of the

moment, what shall be the measure of condemnation meted out to the man who regards the invitation to be in fellowship with God as a trifle, and makes light of *it*, under the excuse that he has something more important to do? And if you condemn the man who breaks through the usual customs of society, and insults the host who has introduced him to a better company than he ever saw before, in what mood should we regard a man who treats the Divine friendship with inward contempt, and refuses to put on the graces and character which befit a new and spiritual life?

Our Lord, in language which nothing can surpass, condemns all such indifference in the world and in the Church. He calls us to moral and religious earnestness, and presses on us the need of taking our place and our privileges to heart.

And all the more ought we to give heed to His words, that the image under which He speaks is that of enjoyment and friendship, and not, as in other parables, the image of labour and responsibility. To feel at home in any society except the best, is not that in itself a proof of a low tone? To hold converse with any except the good and honourable, is not that a proof that the good and the honourable is not the uppermost thing in our hearts and lives?

God has called us to what is best and greatest. He has invited us to be partakers of His spirit and His kingdom. Let us rise to the call, and prove worthy of it, that we may not be called only, but chosen.

Idle Words.

“Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”—MATT. xii. 36, 37.

I QUOTE these verses as showing the general tenor of the passage which I read this morning. They are to be best understood when we take them in connection with the whole passage; and they are not to be separated from what our Lord has been saying, or set up as a distinct and detached truth which is in itself complete. If you read these verses by themselves, apart from all that has been said before, you will have a very striking and remarkable text, no doubt; but you will also have a text which may be misinterpreted and turned to a wrong use. But if you read all that our Lord has said on this occasion, you will see how natural the conclusion is to which He has come, and you will avoid taking a narrow or one-sided view of the truth. I have read these verses, therefore, instead of the whole passage, in order that, in the course of my exposi-

tion of this portion of Scripture, I may gather around them the other sayings and teachings of our Lord, and connect them with the subject on which He was speaking to the people.

The word which the Pharisees had spoken on the spirit of Christ's work was of such a nature as to bring upon them very strong censure. The Pharisees said—"This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils."

Christ meets this objection in two ways: (1) He shows its unreasonableness; and (2) He condemns the spirit in which it is made.

1. The unreasonableness of the objection. It is not true to experience that any power, good or bad, consciously seeks its own destruction. At the root of this answer lies the great fact that good and evil are always in antagonism—that throughout the universe there is a sympathy between all powers which are good, and that there is a bond of union in the same way between those which are evil.

I need not stop to qualify that statement, or to show cases in which it seems to be contradicted. The fact—the general fact—is everywhere admitted, that goodness is drawn to goodness, and evil to evil. Set down a man of dishonest or impure or intemperate life, in any city or country, and within a short time the unseen sympathies and instincts of his nature will have found out the class to which he

belongs, and he will know in a month more about the wickedness of his neighbourhood than a man of good and honest character would discover in a lifetime. There is an affinity between him and all who are like-minded; and very soon like finds out like, and discovers how really one the whole kingdom of evil is—call it by any name you choose. I need not stop to qualify this assertion, or to explain how it is that from time to time there seem to be exceptions to this fact, when one wicked man betrays and informs upon another; that comes under a different order of truth altogether. What I am speaking of in these general expressions is the great fact which Christ indicates, that the powers of evil and the powers of good are separate and distinct, and that each power is ready to maintain and support itself, and each power is ready to defend and protect itself—goodness aiding the good, and evil the evil. The forces of each power are like the forces of an organised empire; they may have occasional disputes and contentions between themselves, but in the time of common danger they rally round one another: they have an instinctive perception of the common danger; they know when they are attacked, and they know that the ruin of one means the ultimate ruin of all. This is the lesson of experience in everyday life, and Christ refers to it as

an indication of the truth of the law everywhere. Just as it can be shown in nature that the law of gravitation in a drop of water is the same law which binds the planets in their courses in the distant heavens, and the same law which reigns through the whole universe of matter; so the law which binds goodness to goodness, or which draws evil to evil, in the instinctive feeling that they are in themselves one, is a law which holds good in the visible and invisible worlds. The powers of evil—so far as they know one another—are all under one great power, and they will not consciously conspire against themselves. If Satan is divided against Satan, how shall then his kingdom stand? Evil is evil everywhere. The evil power will not side with the good in undermining and overthrowing itself. The wide extent of the law of moral feeling is as marvellous as the wide dominion of the laws of matter. You do not change the nature of man or angel by changing the locality. Goodness is goodness here or elsewhere, now or for ever, in man or God; and evil is evil, in this world or in any other, now or hereafter, in man or demon. It is not time or place which changes good or evil, and Christ shows how the nature of sin can never bring forth a power to cure or destroy sin; the two kingdoms of good and evil are for ever apart. This is the law of the moral universe as enforced and illustrated by Christ.

Not many years ago an instrument was invented called the spectroscope—the use of which is to discover, by certain dark lines in it, the presence or absence of particular substances in objects. By means of this instrument turned to sun and star, you can detect the presence of well-known metals in the most distant worlds, and you can prove that the rays of light there are drawn from well-known sources of earthly light—showing how, in heaven and earth, in remotest orbs and in the strata of rock beneath our feet, one great unity of law is to be found. But it seems a far more solemn and impressive fact when one ascertains that in our own hearts, and in the spirits of unseen and unknown powers, the dark and the bright lines of moral evil or of spiritual goodness are identical; and that the motives and influences which sway us in these bodies of clay, are not different from the motives and influences which govern all thought and all moral life throughout the boundless universe of God. We do not know much about the unseen and the spiritual; and it is not necessary we should. Enough is known to make us feel that under one dread rule all being is placed, and that no matter where a spiritual intelligence exists—whether on this world of our own, with its strange mixture of evil and good, or in remotest and most mysterious corners of God's great universe—the

nature of evil and the nature of good is unchanged. Consciously or unconsciously, every man who does good is bound to the great source of goodness, and to all the infinite orders of goodness, whether in man or angel before God; and every man with evil designs—with mean purposes, with unholy passions, with malice, hatred, impurity in his heart—is consciously or unconsciously linked in his history and in his destiny, as he is in his nature, with whatever is opposed to the Holy and Almighty One. Every man carries his own nature, and his own fate, and his own future, within him. The distance of a thousand miles, of a thousand worlds, would not alter the nature of evil in him. Distance is not an element of moral good or evil; and neither is time. And Christ leaves on our hearts by His teaching here the deep and abiding impression that the kingdom of goodness and the kingdom of evil are eternally apart, and each is regulated by its own laws and its own influences through all space and all time. So far as to the idle words of the Pharisees, when they said that Jesus did good by the aid of evil. It is contradicted by universal experience, and by the laws of good and evil everywhere.

2. But there comes worse behind, and the second part of Christ's reply brings out the spirit in which the objection on their part is offered, and the serious

nature of the sin which is involved in it. Our Lord speaks of the blasphemy of the Spirit, and of speaking against the Holy Ghost. Sometimes one hears in ordinary language of "the sin against the Holy Ghost," as if it were some particular act. But when you consider the manner in which Christ treats the subject, you will see, I think, that He refers to a state of mind rather than to any particular act or form of evil. Now what was that state of mind? It consisted in this, that a man might be so separated from all good men and from all purity of life as not to acknowledge the good that was before him. He might be in such a condition of blindness and moral perversity, that he could not recognise the wisest, finest, most generous act which could be performed. That was a state of mind for which no remedy seems possible; and yet, with repentance, a remedy can never be impossible. Christ does not say that, bad as they were, the Pharisees had actually fallen into this sin; but that is what their conduct leads to.

I believe that, both from tradition and from instinct, there is in the minds of most Christians a very deep dread of the sin in question, and that very vague notions of it are entertained. That there should be a dread of it, is not to be wondered at, considering the consequences with which it is followed—"it shall never be forgiven;" and it is well that throughout all

time there should be a shrinking from a crime so fraught with peril. But it is well also that the imagination of men should not be misled, and that, instead of looking for its approach in some dark and deep pathways of sin, we should consider whether it is not to be found in more ordinary forms of evil. Take the case before us. Why does Christ warn men of this dangerous sin? Not because of any act unmistakably wicked and cruel, but because they called evil good, and good evil, confounding the two, and because they were induced to do this from deep prejudice and dislike to the truth when it reflected on themselves. There lay the danger; and there it lies still. The beginnings and symptoms of this sin, so much and so naturally dreaded, are not to be looked for in great criminals or in the annals of great crimes. They are nearer home; they are found in the commoner lives of men who outwardly may have a fair show of goodness. The symptoms of speaking against the Spirit of God are to be discovered in those everyday prejudices which hide the plainest truths from sight. The essence of the sin consists in being out of sympathy with goodness, in that state of heart which takes no interest in the growth of goodness in the world. How far that state of heart must go before it reaches the stage when it may be called blasphemy, and speaking against the Holy Ghost, is a

question better left undetermined. I do not know that our Lord determines it, or that the exact degree of the sin can be laid down. There are some things better left to the conscience than to the intellect, and it is better to have a wholesome fear of bringing down upon ourselves a spiritual evil than to be clear and precise as to the evil itself. And it is for this purpose that the warning is given. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth was speaking when the Pharisees were calling in question the goodness of a good work; and out of the abundance of the heart they were speaking, when they made a deed of mercy and benevolence the ground of an accusation against Christ that He was in league with the power of evil. But the Pharisees are merely specimens of what one may find in every age of the world, and the great evil to be avoided and dreaded is the evil of being separated in spirit and sympathy from goodness and mercy. Now where does that dangerous malady, that evil spirit, begin? To what can we trace its rise? You will find the bitter fountain of this evil stream in prejudice, narrowness of spirit, a wicked desire to find fault, and a wilful shutting of the eye to what is true and good. Have we ever detected in ourselves a secret pleasure that some plan of goodness failed, and that it caused disappointment to somebody we had a grudge against?—there we have detected the

beginning of the sin. Have we ever by word or act misrepresented any person or any system, concealing the virtues of the man or of his system, and obtruding the faults, making it appear to be bad where it was good, or making it appear worse than it was?—there we see the little fountain of bitterness which sends forth these waters. Have we ever, on any occasion, by whispers, as the Pharisees seem here to have done it in whispers—have we ever, by whispers or insinuations, ascribed a good life or a good deed to a mean or selfish motive in some man who was doing his best?—we have displayed a likeness, when we least thought of it, to the old enemies of Christ. The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost lurks here: here, in what seems to be merely meanness, malice, narrowness, and prejudice—here lies the beginning of a sin which may rise and swell until it destroy the whole soul and conscience of man.

From what I have said, we may learn to be careful how we set down everything which does not seem to us to be serious and solemn in the list of idle words.

There is a great tendency in men, and in classes of men, to pass judgment on the words as well as the acts of others who differ in temperament from themselves. There are many things said and done in the world which seem to one to be important and to another to be quite useless and idle. A person who has no im-

agination, and no sense of wit or humour, who looks only on the facts of the world in their dullest and most prosaic aspect, is ready to call every expression which has not some material fact to correspond with it, an idle and useless expression. He sees no need of it; it brings no truth home to him; it lights up no chamber in his spirit, it soothes no irritation, it opens no door for him into the great world of nature or of human life; and inasmuch as it seems to him a waste of language or of feeling, he calls it an idle word or an idle act. All this is one-sided and unjust. The world is wider than any single individual mind, however great and good it may be. There may be a laborious idleness as well as an idleness that is at rest. A life may be a useful one though it accumulates no store of riches or gain. A man may be idle who acts with apparent drudgery, and he may speak idle words when he utters nothing but what can be easily proved to be true. And on the other hand, a man may act and speak in such a way as to appeal only to the taste, the sentiment, the feelings of men, and where it would be hard to prove that all he said was necessary or even true; yet it may be true and necessary, for all that. I do not call words idle simply because they cannot be registered and measured by a matter-of-fact standard. How often has an airy word of pleasantry fallen on the

ear and pierced the shield of prejudice or passion! How often has the cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, but which would soon have overspread the whole sky, been dispersed by a momentary gleam of bright sunshine, and by a word which in itself was only fugitive, and hardly to be remembered! You cannot call that an idle word which is the outflow of simple cheerfulness, if it dissipates an angry thought. It is a useful result, though some would call it frivolous, when, by a brief remark or observation, the friendly feeling, which was slowly departing, is recalled, and when harmony and peace are restored. And it is not always the grave and sententious admonition, the elaborate speech, the solemn utterance, which accomplishes this end: it is simply the word fitly spoken which does the good work; and if it drives out evil humours, and opens the heart and intellect to listen to better things, it is not to be classed amongst idle words.

On the other hand, it is not to be forgotten that there are times when a word thoughtlessly uttered has betrayed the secret character of the life, and has by its folly and ill-timedness done infinite harm. How often when men speak, merely to be speakers instead of hearers, do they fall into the snare of vanity or conceit, and utter idle words whose bad effects shall not soon pass away! Everybody is familiar with

such idle and foolish sayings. Everybody has heard, and perhaps spoken, things which he would give much to forget and recall! Some word spoken in the ear many years ago has been like a spark to a train of gunpowder. Some word uttered by us in levity or thoughtlessness, and merely to excite mirth for the moment, has not only revealed what was in our minds, but has carried its influence to other hearts and lives. There are men and women living in sin who would have been better than they are had it not been for some such random and idle words. There are people in the world who carry with them, to the end of their days, some unhappy and impure impressions, because at some moment of their lives they read or listened to the words which issued from a heart of folly and sin. Day by day we are coming into contact with men whose tone of life is improved or lowered by what we say. By our words we are justified, and by our words are condemned—not as if the evil lay in the word alone, but because it takes shape and form there, and there it finds an outlet. And so it becomes all of us not merely to be on our guard against what we utter, but to keep the door of our hearts that we receive and cherish nothing there which, if it escaped unconsciously or thoughtlessly, would do any one wrong, or hurt in anything the purpose or kingdom of God.

The Christian Name.

“The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”—

ACTS xi. 26.

IN the history of the early Church in this book of the Acts of the Apostles, these few words come in, as it were, by the way. They do not seem necessary to the course of the narrative; and indeed, the fact which is noticed had not any importance for the writer himself, for he never on any occasion calls the members of the Church by that name.

It is most interesting, however, to look back to a period when the very words Christian, and Christianity, and Christendom were not in existence; and it is not less interesting and instructive to consider how these words came into use, and under what circumstances they gradually forced their way.

It is hardly possible for us to speak of the Church of Christ without using the term “Christian.” We can hardly imagine how it was possible for a Church to exist for ten or fifteen or even more years without

being known by the name of Christian: we suppose that such a title must always have existed, and yet it is the fact that it did not.

And, moreover, you will observe that when the name Christian did come into existence, it was not a title of honour assumed by the Church itself, but it was a name given to it by its enemies, and was intended by these enemies to be a term of reproach and not of honour. Universal as the word now is, it does not occur in the writings of the Apostle Paul, and it is never used in the New Testament in the sense in which we use it now, as one of dignity or respect. Agrippa, we are told, used the word when he cried to Paul "Almost thou persuadedst me to be a Christian;" but in doing so, there can be no doubt that he spoke in tones of irony and reproach and not of earnestness; and when the Apostle Peter says, "If any man suffer as a Christian let him not be ashamed," he speaks to those who had bitter experience of the fact that it was regarded in that time by the world at large as a cause for shame that a man should suffer as "a Christian."

On these few facts which I have noticed I mean to say a few words.

I. Considering that the Church existed so long

without taking to itself or receiving from others outside of it a distinctive name, you may gather, I think, that the growth of Christianity itself was silent and unobtrusive. Amongst themselves, it is true, the Christians had a name, or more names than one. They are spoken of by one another as "disciples," "believers," "brethren," "saints;" by Jews as "the sect of the Nazarenes;" and by the world as "people of that way;" but as yet, neither the Church nor the world outside of the Church had agreed upon a common name. And when at last the name of Christian was thought of, it was not at Jerusalem, nor indeed amongst the disciples, but at Antioch, and by the Roman or Greek world, that the epithet was invented.

This fact leads us to a certain conclusion in regard to the spirit in which Christianity was diffused. It was diffused in a spirit of earnestness, quietness, free from outward self-assertion or noise. In this respect its origin was different from the formation of new sects, new societies, new organisations, to whom the name by which they shall be called is a matter of supreme importance. They begin in the spirit of self-consciousness; they unite themselves with the view of separating themselves from all the world, and it is a matter of importance to them to have a name which shall convey to the world the great

principle on which they are united. But you do not find anything like this in the early Church. It looks as if neither Peter, nor John, nor James, nor any of the other apostles, was aware that a new society was being founded which in process of time was to swallow up all other societies and sects then existing in the Jewish nation. The Church is the leaven hid in the three measures of meal, but nobody seems to notice it until it has pervaded the mass: it is like the mustard seed, it becomes a great tree, but it has sprung from the smallest germ; and nobody is so much convinced of its future existence and progress as to give it a separate name. Slowly and silently, like the secret forces of nature, it comes forth, and men only become aware of its existence when they see its effects. One sees every day how this secret spiritual power differs from those powers which sound their own praise and draw to themselves the attention of the world.

When one reads the history of Christ and His disciples, it looks as if neither He nor they contemplated separating themselves from the worshippers of God in the synagogue and in the temple. Jesus Christ commenced His public ministry by teaching in the synagogues of Galilee. He went there on the Sabbath; He sat and listened, and was silent, for thirty years; and after that age He attended still all

the feasts and services of the Jewish Church. He went annually to the festivals at Jerusalem, He kept the passover, He sought to infuse new life into the teaching of their scriptures, and He strove to purge the doctrines of the religious books of the day as He purged the temple, by making room for what was true and divine. But the leaders and heads of the Jewish Church would not accept Him or His teaching, and they drove Him out of the synagogues and put Him to death.

Afterwards, when His disciples were left without their Master, and even after the great change in their life which was witnessed on the day of Pentecost, they showed no wish to break loose from the religious fellowship of their countrymen. They are found, as before, going up to the temple at the hour of prayer; they observe the time-honoured rites of circumcision and the passover; they are present at the morning and evening sacrifices; they obey the Levitical law; they meet, as they had been accustomed to do, in the synagogue and hear the reading of Moses and the prophets. For a long time it does not seem to have occurred to them that it would ever be necessary to form assemblies of their own and to cut themselves off from their old customs. Indeed, it may be doubted whether in the case of many of the earlier Christians they ever did renounce

the religion of Judaism. It so happened that many of them were expelled from their synagogues, and excommunicated because they accepted Jesus as the Messiah; but for the most part they were content to remain as they were before, and to receive the truths of the Gospel, not as overthrowing the law, but as fulfilling it. It was by compulsion and not from choice that they became a separate body of religious worshippers at all. Their position was forced on them. They remained as long as they could in their old forms of worship, and believed that the teaching of Christ had purified and not destroyed the faith of their fathers. But the Jewish leaders would not accept this advance of the truth; they could not reconcile the old and the new; they could not admit that the new had been hid in the old, and that the old had become visible and fresh in the new. They said Christ has come to destroy our customs, He has come to profane our temple, to dishonour our Sabbath, to deprive us of our sacrifices. They could not discern the times; they could not see that the substance was better than the shadow; they could not hear the voice of wisdom when it was uttered, and they would not listen to any doctrine which poured contempt on their traditions, their cleansing of cups and platter, their broad phylacteries, and their routine and meaningless

prayers ; and they cast out the disciples, and made a law that if any man would acknowledge that Jesus was the Messiah he should be put out of the synagogue. This was, in brief, the story of the Church and its separation from Judaism. It was a living growth, which arose out of a living root, and grew up silently and unseen ; and it was on this account that the disciples for long had no distinctive name. The kingdom of God came not with observation. The Church was numerous and strong before it was seen or believed to have within itself a power of self-existence, and it became mighty in an utter absence of all self-consciousness and of all self-glory.

Thus the Church at first grew up. Shall we say that its future progress is to be marked by similar features ? Shall we say that the cause of Christianity is to increase in strength under the same law as that under which it gained strength at the beginning ? It arose in a spirit of unobtrusive and earnest faith in the life and words of Jesus Christ. Its characteristic idea was, "The hope of our fathers is realised, the promise made to them is accomplished." And it was thought that this hope and promise might be enjoyed by simply importing into the old worship the new truths which men had learned. Is not this to be the law of the growth of Christian faith and practice in all coming time ? One may

well wish that it was ; but perhaps the old story may be repeated, and the old narrowness and intolerance may exist. Be that as it may, I think we may learn from the history of the Church to put little faith in self-assertion, to despise the arts of self-praise and self-glorification. I think we may learn to regard the sincere study and practice of the truth which God shows us as the only true road to progress and strength.

Let us not be evermore looking out for something to distinguish us in name and form from others. If we have any good thing to say let us say it, and leave the seed to grow ; if we have any good thing to do let us do it, and allow its influence to tell its own story ; if we have any new truth or old truth on which we wish more stress to be laid, let us give it forth, and trust to the natural growth of truth to find its way into men's hearts.

Let us have more faith, in short, in the native strength of truth and knowledge, and reckon it a comparatively small thing whether our own name and share in the work are recognised or not. Great works were done by the Christian Church before it was called Christian : James, the brother of John, was killed by the sword ; but he never heard himself called by the name of a Christian apostle, nor was ever so called : Stephen fell a martyr to the truth, but

he never had known the phrase "Christian martyrdom," and he never associated the term "Christian" with his own name; and thousands had been converted to the faith of Christ, countless works of mercy had been wrought, before the Church was called the Christian Church, and before its members were called Christians.

II. The name was originally one given in reproach; the disciples were called by Christ's name in contempt. The title was probably invented, not by Jews, in whose ears it would sound blasphemous and profane, but by the Roman citizens of Antioch. And we know, from contemporary history, that the words "Christ" and "Christian" conveyed to a Roman ear ideas of contempt and abhorrence. Nothing was too base which a Christian was not believed capable of doing: he was, in Paul's words, "treated as the off-scouring of the earth." When the Roman Emperor Nero cast some Christians to the wild beasts, and burnt others alive, on the pretence that they had set fire to Rome, one of the greatest historians of his time condemned Nero for his hypocrisy and cruelty; but he adds that the Christians deserved to suffer any amount of torture simply for their connection with Christ, and the historian's anger is aroused not because they were killed, but because they were killed to gratify the cruelty of an individual.

It is not easy for us to imagine a condition of affairs in which the word "Christian" was a term of reproach. We can hardly suppose it possible for such a holy name to be suggestive of anything evil. And yet the significance of names depends very much on association. Even to ourselves the sacred name of Jesus has been associated with a society which has often been regarded, and at this moment is treated, as a public enemy by one of the great nations on the continent of Europe. Sacred as is the name of Jesus to our ears, it has not prevented a bad meaning from being attached to the name Jesuit, or one who belongs to the Society of Jesus. I mention this instance of a good name being to ourselves suggestive of a bad association, not for the sake of fostering bad feelings, still less for the purpose of commending the severe usage to which Jesuits are subjected—because I am persuaded that some of those men who have travelled a thousand miles to congratulate the prince who has expelled the Jesuits, would themselves have fared ill, and would have had their own liberty very much curtailed, had they lived under his government instead of our own,—I have quoted this instance rather to bring home to our minds how easily the name of Christian might come to suggest all manner of wicked associations to men who were ignorant of Christ, and who believed all that was said falsely against Him and His disciples.

The name Christian was given originally to disciples by enemies, and the purpose of giving it was to affix a stigma of reproach on those who bore it. But in the providence of God good has come out of evil, and that which was meant to be an undying disgrace has grown to be a word of eternal honour.

This is not a solitary instance in history where an evil purpose has been overruled for a good end, and where malice and envy have overreached themselves. It is not at all uncommon for opponents in political and religious controversies to bestow hard and unjust names on each other. Nothing has been commoner in the religious history of our country than to call persons who have taken up certain theories or opinions by the name of some distinguished or prominent individual who held these opinions. It is a fault which all sects amongst us have been more or less guilty of. It has served its purpose for a while: it has brought men into contempt; but the cause of truth and of God can never be served or promoted by such unworthy means. You can never do good by misrepresentation or unfairness: the truth will come out at last, and the reproaches of the world will outwit themselves in the end.

III. The common name given to Christians was given when the Church had unity. It was enemies, no doubt, who gave the name; but they spoke the

truth without knowing it. Just as when Christ was crucified, His enemies cried out, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save," what was meant as a taunt was a truth which lay at the very foundation of Christianity: so it was in this case. All who professed the name of Jesus Christ were called by one name; they were all called Christians. The outside world made no nice distinctions: all disciples without exception received the common name, and there was witness borne in this name to the oneness of the Christian society. In those early days there was not that ideal harmony in the Church which we might suppose. In Corinth, we know, one said, "I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; and another, I am of Cephas;" and there were divisions and dissensions enough to grieve the apostle's heart; but the world was keen-sighted enough to discern under all these divisions a unity which the Church herself often overlooked and forgot. There was at Antioch, at least at that time, much external unity. The Church had not lasted long enough to see the fruits of a disunion of spirit. It was a time of ardent faith in their Lord, and a time of hearty love to one another; and this unity is expressed in the fact that all without distinction received from the world one name.

It is sad to think how much this unity has been marred, and how Christendom has been broken up.

into factions and sects, which lay more stress on those points which separate them from one another, than on those which are common to all. But so it is. And the names which are given to these sects, as well as the names which they have taken, show that they are as much concerned about their particular points as they are about the cause of their one common Lord and Head. Yet let us not condemn them altogether. They believe, or have been taught to believe, that Christianity is essentially bound up with their own form of Christianity, and that if the form to which they are so much attached were destroyed, Christianity itself would be in danger of perishing. Instead, therefore, of condemning others—which anybody can do—let us look to ourselves; and whilst we prize the forms of truth and worship we possess, let us not unchurch or despise those who differ from us, but rejoice in every proof which we can find in their life and profession that they glory in the name of Christian.

IV. Looking at the name as a word of history, has it anything to teach us? We too are called Christians. We have inherited the name, and we have inherited much more. Yet in many respect we are different from those who were called Christians in the beginning.

(1.) We have gained something. We have gained what they could not have. We have reaped the

lessons of the history of Christianity. At that time Christianity had no history ; it seemed to many to be just one of those new fancies and systems which are always coming to the surface of society, but which often speedily sink and disappear. They looked on it as a work which might live or die. Gamaliel (Acts v.) was disposed to class it with the work of Theudas—who “boasted himself to be somebody, and who was slain”—and of Judas of Galilee, who “drew away much people after him, and who also perished, and his followers were dispersed;” and Gamaliel moralised on such facts in this fashion, “Refrain from these men, and let them alone : for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought : but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it ; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.” In those early days the future of Christianity was wholly a mystery ; neither friends nor foes could anticipate it. The enemies of Christianity thought they could stifle it with a word. It sounds almost incredible to us to read these words of the high priest : “Did not we straitly command you, that ye should not teach in this name ?” He thought it could be put down, as other enemies afterwards thought that by persecution they could root it out of the earth. They never dreamt of its great historical future. And as little did the Christians themselves forecast the coming ages of

Christendom. Indeed they did not think there was to be a future for Christianity at all. They supposed that the last hour of the world's history had arrived, and that they would live to see the Lord descend from heaven and bring all history in its ordinary sense to a close. To them it would have been a most perplexing fact if they had been told that centuries were to pass away, and all things were to continue as before, new causes producing new effects, and generation after generation rising up and decaying. The early Christians did not count on such a future for Christianity. But we have seen its history; we have seen its developments, its influences on the world—how it has changed countries and men, how it has acted on national laws and on social usages; we have seen the mighty revolutions it has accomplished. And in this respect we have been gainers. We have seen the process of that leavening of which Christ speaks in His parable. We have seen the results of its diffusion amongst tribes which were then uncivilised. We have seen its power to raise women in society—its power to purify domestic life—its effects on art, on history, on philosophy; we have seen its power to change the ideas of mankind as to themselves, their hopes, their destiny. All this we have seen, and in all this we stand on a higher vantage-ground than they. We have lived on to the summer and the harvest,

and have reaped what they sowed; and in this experience, which we have acquired by a knowledge of the history of Christianity, we have been the gainers.

(2.) But there are some points in which we have been losers by living at this period of its history. The stream of Christian history has not always flowed through pure channels, and it is not to be wondered at if much that is of the earth has mixed with its waters. Our Confession of Faith says very truly, "All synods or councils since the apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred; therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be used as an help in both." This is the careful conclusion of a document which does not claim for itself more than it declares of the deliverances of all other assemblies of theologians; though many who hold fast by the Confession forget that this disclaimer of infallibility is one of its articles. And in these last times, with all our advantages from history, we have lost something of the simplicity and incorruptness of the early Christians. We read history backwards. We begin at the mouth of the river and go upward, and we think that the salt or brackish taste is the right one; and as we draw near to the fountainhead, we do not relish the pure and tasteless stream. We begin to read and study Christianity as we know it; and as we go back in the history

of the Church, we carry with us our prejudices and our tastes, and when we come to the early source of Church life, and find a confession of faith which says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; if thou believest with all thine heart, thou shalt be saved," we say there is too much simplicity in this—there is a want of force and pungency. "Whom say ye that I am?" says Christ; and Peter answered, "Thou art the Son of God, the Christ." We have lost our power to appreciate a profession of our Christianity so simple and so divine as this; we insist on something more complex, something that shall savour more of human reason and human philosophy. We compel Hindoo and Mussulman, the children of Africa and of the South Seas, the sons and daughters of races which know nothing of our history, and nothing of our controversies, and nothing of our long experiences, to fill up the measure of their religious beliefs by speaking in our language; and inasmuch as we have thus substituted a human for a divine form of simple trust and faith in God and in His Gospel, we have been losers. In some respects this result has been inevitable in our own case; but if we are sensible that it is a loss, we may help others, especially in regions where the Gospel is being preached for the first time, to avoid it.

Above all things, let us try to enter into the meaning of our Christianity, and to realise what

it is to be heirs to the name of Christian. Let us take up the work of those who have gone before us, and carry it out in the spirit of primitive zeal and charity. Much remains to be done. Who would have thought, when the Church first received this name, that after eighteen centuries the world should be spoken of as a field for Christian labour to enter on? Looking forward, if it had been possible for them to look forward so far, the early Christians must have believed it impossible for so many ages to elapse without witnessing the perfect triumph of the Christian cause. But the progress of the world is slow, and this may teach us to look to the future in a spirit of patience and waiting. There is a place for us as Christians to fill, and a work for us as Christians to do: let it not be left undone. Let us prove ourselves worthy of the name we bear. Let us feel that it is a higher honour and a better life to be a Christian—*i.e.*, one who is living in the spirit of Jesus Christ—than to be anything else. For the humblest as well as the greatest may attain to this honour; and in proportion as every one has fulfilled this high calling, has he served his generation and accomplished the great end of his existence.

Temptation.

“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation : the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”—MATTHEW xxvi. 41.

IN speaking on the necessity of watching against temptation and resisting it, I shall not dwell on the incident recorded by the evangelist on this occasion, but take the words as a guide to a general duty which falls on every one in the matter of the temptations of life.

Before doing so, let me say a few words on different kinds of temptation to which men are exposed.

1. Of the sources of temptation, I name first—

Temperament and Disposition. Although all men are prone to do evil, all individuals do not tend to the same kinds of evil. Every man is not naturally disposed to be cruel and vindictive; every man is not passionate and ill-tempered; every man is not under impulses to defraud and rob, and act dishonestly; and there are many men to whom by nature every kind of excess and intemperance is abom-

inable. There are others, again, who are apparently, from the very beginning, the victims of evil passion, or who seem to be by nature deceitful, false, hypocritical, and mean.

It is by no means uncommon to find traces of hereditary vices in individual constitutions. The child derives from the parent, and even from a remoter ancestor, a predisposition to peculiar faults and vices. Not only is there the general fact of wickedness, but wickedness of a particular shape comes out in different families and individuals. The mysteries of the human spirit are very perplexing, and one is often disposed to doubt whether many forms of evil are not in reality a kind of disease. There are cases so extreme that one would almost set them down to moral madness at once, where, judging from the outside, one would be at a loss to say whether crime was crime or something else—a dangerous doctrine, no doubt, to preach or to hold, and a doctrine which every man's own conscience will condemn regarding himself. For every man's own conscience tells him that there is a wide difference between temptation and yielding to temptation. No man will accept the doctrine for himself—even when it tells in his own favour—that he is not to blame when he does wrong. No; conscience is an impartial judge: it refuses to let us off so easily; it maintains the re-

sponsibility of the individual. Each man must admit that he has a witness within him which says, "I ought not to have done wrong." Every man feels that he might have kept out of temptation, might have stood where he fell, and remained guiltless where he has sinned. No man wholly excuses himself, even when he has acted under passion, and has been hurried along as by a torrent by his own vicious inclinations and tastes. He knows that his will consented—that he was not forced—that there was no power dragging him a captive. Every man knows that where he has done wrong and fallen into evil courses, he *gave himself up* to it for the time being; and neither the faults of his parents, nor the violence of his own nature, can be accepted by himself as an apology for yielding to temptation.

If a man, indeed, were to declare that it is simply impossible for him to avoid falling into temptation when he is enticed—if he should say that sin is his master, and that he can no more help giving way to it than the needle can resist the magnet,—he would be declaring virtually that he is an animal, and nothing more—that he is such a slave to his appetites and passions as to be unfit to keep company with sane and reasonable men. But nobody would carry out that doctrine; nobody in his right reason would say, "I am helpless before temptation—my

will and my judgment are paralysed." Every man must admit that, whatever be the strength of his propensities, he has another power placed within him which makes him responsible to God and to himself for his faults and sins. All that is true; but it is true also that one great source of sin is the temperament or disposition which each man has by nature, which he inherits, and which renders temptation such a strong and dangerous thing.

2. Another source of temptation lies in the circumstances with which a man is surrounded, and the training under which he has been brought up. These forces are often as strong as the forces of natural temperament and inclination. Each sphere of life has its own temptations and its own difficulties, and in each men are blind to the condition of others. Few of us can understand another's difficulties, and as little can we understand another's temptations. Nay, there are few of us who can enter even into the trials of those who are tempted as we ourselves were once tempted. We do not make allowances for failings which were once our own. We forget the impulsiveness of youth, the fickleness of childhood, the jealousies and suspicions of a time when we thought ourselves overlooked or despised; and if we are thus incapable of sympathising, or unwilling to sympathise, with persons who are now as we ourselves were at a

former time, how much more incapable are we of entering into the condition and temptations of those in whose place we never were !

It cannot be denied that there are many persons so educated and so situated in life that they are exposed to strong temptations from which others are free. And it is one feature of our modern Christianity that it takes far more into account these diversities in human life than even the best men used to do in former times. There are many virtues which are the growth of training and civilisation, and which are not appreciated by those who have been unfavourably placed in their early upbringing. There are many sins and forms of coarseness and vice which you would almost say were unavoidable, when you consider how children, in many cases, have been trained. It used to be regarded as savouring too much of a low tone of religion to ascribe any of the sins of life to the outward circumstances in which men and women grew up. And there are still good religious people who refuse to see any root of evil in these outward circumstances by which thousands are surrounded. This, however, is not the general mode of thinking now : most people have come to believe that the surroundings of a child and boy and man have much to do with the man himself. The virtues of purity, decency, reverence, modesty, are not expected

to grow up and thrive in houses and homes where no provision is made for cultivating these virtues. Good dwellings and suitable accommodation will not of themselves make the heart good and pure; they will not make an impure mind holy, nor will they alone turn an uncharitable spirit into one of tenderness. But, on the other hand, there are places where you would almost say it was impossible for a young mind to grow up with a proper sense of what is gentle, and pure, and good: from earliest years there are associations which can never be wholly got rid of, memories which cannot be thrown aside—ideas, and thoughts, and words, and habits, which penetrate the soul and carry defilement with them; and it makes one's heart sad to see how many of one's fellow-creatures are apparently doomed to a life where, to use a homely expression, they have not fair-play, and where, unless by something like a moral miracle, they can scarcely escape contamination. And if these dangers and temptations exist only in the case of one class, let it not be thought that in the case of any class there is entire freedom from temptation.

In some cases like these, it is hard to say where the individual can either watch or pray against temptation; he is born to it, it is his inheritance and lot: and in such a case you must bring into operation another Christian virtue and command, "Bear ye one

another's burdens." Some one must come to the rescue ; and the responsibility on those by whose fault these hereditary dangers and outward temptations have been produced is all the greater. Even at the worst, there is a power stronger than outward circumstances. As the youth grows up to the man, he knows well that he is not wholly a slave to his condition. He sees others who were as ill situated as himself grow up and throw off the effects of earlier training ; he sees refinement instead of coarseness, purity instead of wickedness ; and he feels that he too is responsible for his inward consciousness and knowledge of good and evil.

And now, passing from the sources of temptation, let me speak of the necessity of watching against it.

1. One reason for watchfulness, or for being always on one's guard, is our ignorance of self.

If, indeed, there is one person a man thinks he knows well, it is himself ; and in one sense that is true. He knows facts about himself which are unknown to any one besides ; he knows his own history, he knows his own thoughts, and he knows many of his own weaknesses too. But withal, there is in every one a great ignorance of his own defects, and consequently a great deal of self-confidence in matters where he has not been tried. You constantly hear

people say what they would do if they were rich or in places of power: how they would use their wealth and influence; how they would avail themselves of their opportunities to do good and to put down abuses. They imagine that the change of place and circumstance would have no effect upon their nature and their conduct. They suppose that their character and purposes would remain as they are if they were transplanted from their present condition and set down in one wholly unlike it. But as I have said, every man is a servant as well as a master of his circumstances. He moulds them, it is true, but he is moulded by them in turn; and no one can foresee what would happen if his outward condition in life were altered. No one looking at the surface of the sea in a calm could imagine its appearance in a storm; not till the wind howls and the waves rise, could he conjecture the terrific force of the tempest. So, in looking at his own nature and character, no man can forecast the effects of a change of circumstance, or measure the force of temptation. When Hazael was told what fraud and cruelties he would be guilty of at a future day, he answered the prophet (2 Kings viii. 13), "But what! is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" He did not believe what he was capable of becoming. There was nothing of this cruelty apparent in his disposition,

and he could not imagine a time or a condition in which such cruelty would show itself. This ignorance of self seems strange, but it is nothing rare. A man knows his own moral strength when it has been tested; but what notion can he form of what will happen when he is tried by new forms of temptation to which he has never been subjected? Moreover, there grow up within a man, in the ordinary course of life and habit, new powers and new tendencies which he could not foresee. Time works vast changes in men, so does a new responsibility, a new power, a new opportunity, a new chance of pleasure. No one can foretell the future from the past, when the future contains elements which were not in the past. A sudden change from poverty to wealth develops pride, conceit, a domineering spirit. Men grow headstrong, or covetous, or disagreeable in manner, by success and prosperity, who would have continued patient and pleasant enough if they had been left in their original quiet state. A sudden change from wealth to poverty has its own temptations too. It is quite true that you may see the germ of the man in the child and in the boy, and you may often and for the most part judge of the future by what you have seen in the past. But just as climate has an effect on trees and flowers, and on the organic development of living things, so a new world of wealth,

a new world of pleasure, a new world of opportunities, has an influence upon the life of man. Place him in a new region, a new society, amid new associations, and no one can predict the result. And so it often happens that the man who has begun well ends ill. He is self-confident. He leaves out of view the effects which the changes of the world produced. He leaves out of sight the growth of desires by self-indulgence, and the weakening of his powers through occasional yielding to sin; and slowly, and by degrees, he ceases to be what he was once. You can no longer rely upon his steadfastness, his sobriety, his word of honour, his promise, as you could do once. Watch then—watch carefully—lest there be creeping in an evil habit, which time will strengthen, and which will in the end prove too strong to be cast out. A man may well be jealous of himself, and doubt whether he really does know himself, when he sees how so many, not less sincere and intelligent than he is, have miscalculated their own powers, and lost their position of character and strength.

2. Watchfulness is needed, because the trial of man's character is lifelong. If the fight between good and evil were one pitched battle, it might be easy to gird on all one's armour, and to gather up all one's strength, and for a short space to stand firm and resolute. But such is not the character of our temp-

tations. Hence there is room for watchfulness, whether the retrospect is one of failure or of success. If there is a remembrance of our failure in the hour of temptation, it needs no counsel from the lips or pen of another to warn us against self-confidence ; our own heart tells us the need of watchfulness. But even if the remembrance is one more sweet and agreeable, and if we associate our temptation in the past, not with defeat and loss, but with victory over evil, none the less is the advice needed, "Watch !" Men may be on their guard against their infirmities, but unwary where they deem themselves strong. And just as every reader of history is familiar with stories which tell how fortresses and castles were taken by the enemy, not on their weak and well-guarded side, but on the side where they were deemed impregnable, and where watching was thought useless, so has it been a thousand times in the history of the human mind and life. The faithful Abraham fell into distrust ; the meek Moses was ruffled in spirit ; the wise Solomon was overreached by acts which he might have withstood ; the courageous Peter, even when warned by Christ, was drawn into an act of cowardice. So we often see it in common life. We see the man of strong understanding thrown off his guard, and doing foolish things ; the man of integrity, by some impulse, turned aside from the straight path ; and so every

man may have cause, on reflection, to say that he was weak where he had thought himself strong, and had forgotten the precept, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

Watchfulness of spirit will effect much. But it will be greatly helped if it is combined with a spirit of devotion and religious trust: indeed that will be a source of strength in itself, and will prop up a man when he is ready to fall.

The spirit of religion, which refers all its acts and purposes to God, raises a man above himself, and gives him a strength which in one sense is his own, but in a truer and higher sense is not his own. If religion were a mere sentiment or emotion, and nothing more, it would have a good effect in nerving a man to withstand evil; but it is much more. It is a faith, a life; and it is a life which has its roots in the unseen and eternal life of God. A sense of religious responsibility to God strengthens the sense of right against wrong. But religion does more; it maintains the faith of God as the ruler of the world, and it keeps up the courage of a believer in God to think that, when he is resisting evil and temptation, he is not fighting single-handed, but has the eternal law and will of God on his side. A battle between good and evil is not an encounter between one man and another, or between one part of a man's nature and

another. It is all that, but it is more ; it is a battle in which the individual man is one of many—one of an infinite number—one rather, we may say, of God's great army, whereby the battle of good against evil is carried on in the universe. The weakest man, and the man tempted to wrong, may take courage by knowing that when he is resisting evil, it is not merely a struggle between himself and the world or any other power of evil, but that it is part of the great contest where God is on the one side and all evil powers whatsoever on the other.

Every one knows how, in any encounter, it helps a man mightily to know that he is not single. But in this greatest of all encounters—whether a man shall be true or false, pure or impure, temperate or self-indulgent, charitable or malicious—whether, in short, he shall stand firm in the right, or shall yield to the clamour of passion and fall,—it must impart incalculable strength in this encounter to know that the struggle is just a part of the great contest between God's will and evil in all its forms. The words of the Apostle John are not too strong to express this thought when he says: "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" And the words of St Paul are no less striking: "If God be for us, who

can be against us?" Each occasion on which the soul rises into communion with God, striving to realise the oneness of God's spirit with man's spirit in the great work of life, adds courage and strength. And I am persuaded that if, instead of merely looking at our lot and its temptations and trials as a scene of personal warfare, we were to look higher, and see in all that befalls us an instance of what is going on in the great struggle between good and evil in God's universe, we would find the task of holding on to the right much simpler and easier. We should then stand, not in our own strength, but in the strength of God, and with calm and trustful spirit should find help in Him.

Judging Others.

“Judge not, and ye shall not be judged : condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned : forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.”—LUKE vi. 37.

THE whole discourse in this chapter illustrates the spirit of the golden rule, “Do to others as ye would that men should do to you.” And these words which I have read carry the rule into detail in the matter of judging and forgiving.

It is very natural for us all to imagine that we can exercise the difficult gift of judging the conduct and lives of others. We fall, as it were, instinctively into the habit of expressing our opinion of men and of their ways, without taking into account our incapacity ; and even when we are quite satisfied of the correctness of our judgment on the score of information, we shut out of view that spirit of kindness and good feeling which might tone down our judgment and soften it. And there are few things in which we require more to learn a lesson than in this very common and familiar practice.

I need hardly stop to point out that the case before

us is one which touches the private or ordinary life of man. Christ is speaking to His disciples — to those who are to lead the Christian life, and to dwell amongst their neighbours in the common social duties. He is not interfering with the duties of the state or of the courts of law ; he is not treating with contempt the relation of judge and magistrate, whose duty it is to restrain vice and to deter the wicked from acts of wickedness. He is simply addressing His words to those who in thoughtlessness or idleness usurp the place of judgment, to which they have no claim. And I take the words to apply to ourselves in our everyday life, when we are handling freely the character and actions of one another.

I. Consider, then, one or two things which ought to check and restrain us in our judgments and criticisms upon others.

First, let us think how little we really know. What we see is but a small part of what is unseen and what can never be seen. Nothing commoner than to judge of a man's charitable acts, for instance. We form to ourselves an idea of what he ought to do, we observe, as we think, what he actually does, and we judge accordingly. In reality, we know perhaps neither the one nor the other. We see what he does in part, but probably it is but the smallest part. We know noth-

ing about numerous claims which are made upon him, and we imagine that, were we in his place and gifted with his means, we should make a much wiser and better use of our opportunities, and that we should expend our wealth in a much more generous fashion.

And in like manner, in regard to a man's general character and sentiments, we often judge in utter ignorance of what we are judging, or at least on very imperfect knowledge. In our past life we have often had to correct by experience the hasty conclusions which we had previously reached. Some public man has been judged by us on insufficient grounds: by one or two expressions which he has used, or which he was said to have used, we have formed an opinion which our better acquaintance with him has proved to have been utterly erroneous. And these errors are less blameworthy than other errors which we may have made in our judgment of others, when we have acted, not in ignorance, but in a spirit of severity and censoriousness.

Again, in judging of others, we are apt to overlook their difficulties and temptations. We do not make due allowance for their position. There are persons who profess to be filled by a spirit of perfect righteousness, who set up a standard so high and pure that scarcely one in ten thousand could be tried by it without being condemned. They will listen to no

explanations; they will accept no apology; it is enough for them that a transgression has been committed; their minds are made up—they judge and condemn. Yet how little they know often of the persons whom they judge! To be able to form an accurate judgment of an individual, we require to know something of his history, his trials, his sufferings, his inner life. We may be ascribing things to a wrong cause—we may be laying to the account of bad temper or ill-nature what we should ascribe to ill health or hidden sorrows; and we ought to be ready to hear explanations which might remove entirely our false impressions of a man's words or acts.

So in all matters where we are ignorant, we should hold our judgment in reserve.

II. Consider that your judgment of others is the measure of that judgment which must overtake yourself. Why should we be judged as we judge? Is it simply as a matter of retribution, or as a matter of recompense? Is a man laid hold of in the course of Providence and treated as he treated others, merely to show that in the providence of God righteousness fulfils its law, and that justice overtakes the unjust? That can hardly be the cause. There can be no satisfaction in thinking that because one man has acted harshly to others, others will act harshly

towards him. We cannot wish to see retribution in that sense: it would be a pain and not a pleasure to us to think that, in order to execute the will of God towards an evil-doer, it is necessary that some one should in turn play the evil-doer to him. There can be no satisfaction in contemplating any course of events in which righteousness and fairness do not occupy the chief part; and in the carrying out of the law which Christ mentions here, there must be a principle at work which is perfectly fair and just.

In judging others, a man practically declares what his notions of right and wrong are. If he condemns an act, he condemns it on some grounds which appear to him to be firm and true; if he passes sentence on the conduct or character of an individual, he does so for reasons which seem to him good, or which he professes to regard as good. These are his grounds of judgment. He claims to know what is right and what is wrong; and his knowledge of right and wrong is the standard by which he judges men. It is only fair, then, that a man should be tried by his own standard of what is right or wrong. A man's own conscience, his inward discernment of what is true or false, must be for him the guide to life; he cannot do otherwise than abide by it. If he is faithful to the light which is in him, that light will doubtless increase in strength; if he is unfaithful to it, it

will grow dim and dark. You cannot judge of a child by a man's wisdom; you cannot try an ignorant man morally by the same standard which you apply to a man of knowledge and understanding: it would not be fair to judge a man who had never known the truth, by the same law which you employ in judging of one who has always known it. If a man, then, is rigorous and severe—if he applies to the conduct of others a high standard, and if he expects that standard to be reached, finding fault and passing condemnation where it is not reached,—he is virtually laying claim to a high knowledge of what right and wrong really are; and it is only just and reasonable that this knowledge should be the criterion to which his own conduct and life should be brought: he cannot complain if he is judged by what he actually knows.

So far, we see how there is no vindictiveness in judging men as they have judged others. Men are not judged by a particular rule simply to punish them or to take vengeance on them; they are judged by their own knowledge—they have chosen their own standard, and there is nothing harsh or unfair in testing them by it.

The same truth is presented here in two separate forms—as a threat, and as a promise. “Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: give, and it shall be

given unto you ; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again." We cannot say that this result is attained all at once. Our Lord Himself was an instance to the contrary : He did not receive into His bosom what He had given out ; He did great good, and sought the good of others, but He was requited with evil and with ingratitude. Moreover, this promise seems to be inconsistent with what is said elsewhere, " If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." How, then, do we explain the meaning of the words, and how are they fulfilled ? And to this question I am disposed to reply, that a man of a kind and forgiving spirit, who has lived a life of goodness and charity, creates by his life a new power in society ; he helps to produce a new and better feeling in the world, and by the slow and silent influence of his example and of his spirit, he raises in the course of time a spirit like his own. For character is a thing of slow growth : it does not come in a day nor perish in a day ; its influence is not felt all at once. It is long before you thoroughly know a man : for a long time his words and acts are only partially understood ; when he does right and speaks right, he does not get credit for what he says and does ; often it is years before the world learns to

interpret correctly his character in all its details, and therefore it may be long before he experiences the full force of the words, that with what measure he metes, it is measured to him again. Nay, it may not be in his own lifetime that he is rightly judged at all. There have been cases without number where justice has been done to the memory of a good man only by posterity. Christ Himself was not judged as He judged. And He has left us a prediction that as He was in the world, so should His disciples be in the world. He has been better judged since. But how few can be content to live for others and for the future; how few can appreciate the work of a life which is devoted to the welfare of the world, and which finds its happiness and reward in raising the tone of human life!

It is the law of God's providence that the influence of a good life should be for good, and that the tendency of goodness and kindness should be to produce these virtues in others.

III. It is carrying out the same truth in figurative language when Christ says, "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye?"

In the language which our Lord thus uses, He presses on us a lesson which comes home to every

man's conscience more or less. In their literal meaning the words could never be true, or express a reality; but in their spiritual meaning they are most true, and they express facts which our own experience bears witness to every day. No man with his bodily eye injured or dimmed could be ignorant of the fact or insensible to the pain. He would know his defect: he would know that he was incapable of discerning clearly how to act, and he would willingly take aid instead of offering it. But in the spiritual world the same knowledge of self and of its infirmities is wanting. A man destitute of sight does not place himself in the foolish position of giving advice to one who is able to see; but when we withdraw into the region of mind and spirit, we find men ignorant of their true selves—imagining they see when they are blind, believing themselves to be free of faults which everybody else observes. They discern weaknesses and shortcomings in others; and they speak of them and condemn them, and suggest to others how these faults might be cured and removed, and all the while they are blinded by self-love or by uncharitableness, and cannot discern that in their own inward souls there are faults compared with which the faults they condemn in others are but as motes to beams.

Take another aspect of the truth. The same con-

trast may be seen in the different tone in which people speak of their own faults from that which they assume when talking of the faults of others. The spirit which our Lord teaches is just the very reverse of this. Instead of being strict towards others and lenient to ourselves, the spirit of speaking and judging of offences which He inculcates is to be gentle towards others and severe to ourselves. And when once the spirit of true, genuine penitence has begun to show itself in a man, this is the course which it takes. The Psalmist in his penitence says, "My sin is ever before me." He cannot forgive himself: he cannot look on his sin with calm or easy mind. It never appears to him trivial. He feels its bitterness; he knows the deep root of evil out of which it sprang, and he condemns it. To a man with the spirit of penitence in him, his own faults are never made less than they are; and indeed the more he condemns himself, the more will he be ready to justify others. He feels the mote in his own eye to be as a beam, and he reserves his highest condemnation for his own faults and sins.

IV. Are we, then, to be blind to the sins of the world around us?

Let it not be thought that it is the design or tend-

ency of our Lord's teaching to do away with our making any distinction between good and bad in the lives of others, or to put an end to the faculty or habit of judging between good and evil. Our Lord's teaching is calculated to enforce righteous judgment, not partial or false judgment. It is often one of the most important duties of a man to exercise his judgment in regard to the conduct of others. It is the duty of a parent—it is the duty of a Christian teacher—to draw a distinction between what is right and wrong, what is good and bad, in human lives, for the guidance of his children or pupils. There is nothing in Christian teaching to sanction tolerance towards sin. It is as wrong to call iniquity by gentle names as to call goodness by harsh names. You may do much harm by speaking mildly of covetousness, or pride, or sensuality, or falsehood, as if you were to sneer at honour or truth, or purity or godliness. If you draw a chart of a river, it is as much your work to set down every rock or shallow or current as it is to give the line of the deep channel; and if you point out to others the path of the Christian life, it is your duty to warn them against the life which leads away from it. You must condemn the evil as well as approve and praise the good.

It is not every kind of judgment which Christ condemns. He does not forbid to judge the life

or works of one another; what He forbids is a judgment from which the spirit of love is absent.

Let the spirit of love be in the heart, and the spirit of true judgment will follow. Observe the mighty influence which charity has in modifying and controlling the judgments we pass on those whom we love, and for whose character and welfare we are jealous. The judgment is not blinded by partiality; rather is it purged by the power of affection: but whilst we cannot hide from ourselves the faults which deserve censure, we take no pleasure in proclaiming them to the world.

I have spoken of great moral and spiritual duties to which Jesus Christ calls us. Need I say that this lofty tone of generous feeling which He enjoins on us is not a *mere act* which is to be done, but is part of a great and divine life which must spring up from within? The moving force of all Christian action is Christian life; and without this indwelling power of life, all inferior motives and acts are but as mechanism—a form and nothing else.

And what is the source of this inner and divine life? Whence comes the power which gives rise to these great and holy principles of charity and righteousness? And where are we to seek for them? An all-important question, but happily a question which the history of God's dealings with

mankind has already answered—a question which has already received an answer in our own conscience and experience. We can love much and forgive much, and show much charity in our judgment, because we have been loved much and have been much forgiven, and because our own works and lives have been regarded with that infinite forbearance and compassion which only God could show. He has taught us how to look on the deeds and ways of our brethren, by Himself looking on our ways in the spirit of mercy. By gently opening our eyes to truth and goodness, He has made us feel the glory of being workers with Him in practising tenderness and forbearance towards others, and in striving to make known the truth to them without arrogance and pride.

The nearer we come to look on that divine life of love which is in God, and which came so near to us in the life and words of Jesus Christ, the more shall we fulfil the grand end of our being, and the more deeply shall we realise that these precepts of Jesus Christ are not enjoined on us as a task, and are not to be practised under a sense of bondage and fear, but are rather the very freedom of the soul; for it is only in union with the life and spirit of the living God that we can accomplish them, and rejoice in them as proofs of our oneness with our Father in heaven.

1. Before judging of the individual, then, in any

case, pause to think how much you *really know*, and let not your judgment of a man be formed on hearsay and imagination. In judging of him consider his history, his opportunities, his difficulties, his temptations; and whilst you are rigorous in regard to actions of evil, be careful how you apply them.

2. Remember that your judgment of others is the measure of that judgment which must overtake you. You have set up the standard; by the same standard you must abide. It is not a matter of capricious retribution: it is one of reason, and righteousness, and necessity.

3. Let your judgment of others take the tone of your judgment passed first on yourself.

4. Let all things be done under the remembrance of how much we ourselves owe to a love which is boundless, a forgiveness which has raised us from doubt and fear.

Christ's Forgiveness.

“ Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do.”

—LUKE xxiii. 34.

IT is remarkable how little the evangelists speak of the sufferings of Jesus Christ as bodily sufferings. They do not dwell on the details of His passion as if great stress was to be laid on the amount of pain He had endured. They take us into a sphere of life much more sacred. They do indeed tell us of Christ's scourging, and mocking, and crucifixion, but they do not use language such as we sometimes hear in Christian discourses. So calm, so unimpassioned is the story of the crucifixion—so free from any condemnation of the actors in it—that if you did not know that the writers were deeply interested in the cause of Christ, you could hardly tell whether they were on His side, or whether they were mere historians of an event which in nowise concerned them.

And Christ Himself says little. There are seven sayings recorded as uttered ~~at the cross, or on it.~~ One of them expresses the desolation of His spirit,

and one of them expresses His sensation of thirst in that hour when He was exhausted ; but the other five sayings are not expressions of pain.

Again, when He was on the way to Calvary, and when the women were bewailing His approaching death, He said, " Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children."

And both Christ and His biographers draw our attention to those truths connected with the cross which are not temporary, but ~~which endure, and~~ which are real for all coming time.)

In this text we see that Christ's thoughts are turned away from Himself to others—from Himself to enemies—to those who are doing Him grievous wrong, who are committing an act which will for ever be regarded as the crowning act of sin on the face of the earth. But Jesus Christ has no thought of anger, or vengeance, or personal feeling at all. This word tells us of the hidden depth of love and compassion in His heart ; it tells us of His boundless sympathy with those who are sinners. He knows " what they do ;" but He can, even when He is suffering, look at the act as they look on it. He can see it with their eyes ; He can put Himself in their place ; He can imagine their ignorance of the nature of the deed, and their utter unconsciousness that there was any wrong in what they were doing ; and He can enter into their thoughts

and feelings in such a way as to make Him regard them not with anger, but with pity. In so far as ~~the extreme wickedness of the deed was hid from them, and in so far as they were acting under blindness and delusion and ignorance of its real nature,~~ Jesus Christ can enter into their sympathies, and have compassion on their infirmities.)

This prayer included many. It included all who had any share in the mockery, and crucifixion, and death of Christ. It included the Roman governor, who had given authority to crucify Him; the Roman soldiers, whose duty it was to see the sentence carried out into execution; the Jewish priests and rulers, who cried out for judgment; the multitude, who were stirred up by their religious guides and rulers. All these various classes were ignorant of the true nature of the deed which they were committing, but all were not equally ignorant. Some knew more than others; and according to their greater knowledge was their guilt, according to their ignorance was their personal share in the prayer offered at the cross.

Not one of these knew altogether what he was doing, or how great was the sin in which he was taking part; and each of these individuals or groups of individuals has some one or many to correspond to them in our own day and amongst ourselves in this age.

There is Pilate's sin. What was it, and how could

it be regarded as done in ignorance? It was the sin of a man who held human life and human right cheap, when put in the balance with selfish interests and worldly fears. Pilate had no desire to put Christ to death: he wished to spare Him: he found no fault in Jesus Christ. Nay, on the day of Christ's condemnation, Pilate was the only one who had a word to say on Christ's behalf. He did what no disciple ventured to do—he bore testimony to the innocence of Jesus Christ: he said, in answer to the cry of "Crucify Him!" "Why, what evil hath He done?" and he declared openly, "I find no fault in Him." And yet, in the face of his own avowed belief in the innocency and righteousness of Jesus Christ, he utters the fatal word which none but he could utter—he passes sentence of death. The dread power of life and death, which he claimed and which he exercised, was abused by him. He took to himself that power which he had from God only to execute righteous judgment, and he used that power contrary to its intention. If Jesus was innocent, Pilate had no power to condemn Him. If Jesus was guilty, Pilate had no power to release Him; but Pilate disregarded his own peace of mind and the just limits of his power, and yielded to the pressure of the priests and rulers and multitude. He consented to do an act, in itself wrong, cruel, and

which he could never recall or remedy, to gratify others and to guard his own personal interests. He sinned against the light which he had; and so far as he did so, and knew what he was doing, he was placing himself outside of Christ's prayer by wilful acts of evil. But there were elements in his sin which he did not know. He knew a part, but not the whole crime which he was committing. He was placed in a difficulty from which he could not extricate himself: he was helpless in the presence of men who were roused by a spirit which he could not comprehend. He knew neither the good nor the evil of that great religious excitement which demanded the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. He underrated it all. He hated the cares of an earnest mind: he desired to end the commotion which had been raised; his easy nature, his conscience, ill trained and feeble, were soon exhausted; and thus he felt that he had no alternative but to comply with the demand of the multitude. He washed his hands of the whole matter: he refused to accept the responsibility of either saving Jesus or putting Him to death; he yielded to the pressure brought to bear on him, and he failed to see his own sin in its true light.

Even Pilate, then, wicked as he was, came within the scope of this prayer on the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

There were, next, the Roman soldiers. They do not occupy a very prominent place in our thoughts when we think of the crucifixion; but in the actual event of that day, their presence and the work assigned to them were conspicuous. It fell to them to guard Jesus from the hall of judgment to Calvary; it was their task to carry out the sentence. It was they who were nearest to Him when He spoke; it was they who had stripped Him of His garment, who had set up the cross and stretched His arms on it, and finished the dread act by piercing His hands and His feet; and at that moment they were casting lots for His raiment, and were too intent on the issue to heed His sufferings and His shame.

Their office thus far was degrading; and yet they were bound to obey the commanding officer, the centurion. They had no right to question his instructions. They took their share in this event as they would have begun a march or fought an enemy; they were mechanical agents, mere instruments in the hands of the Roman authority, incapable, even if they had desired it, of resisting the will of their superior. There they were, having no feeling, no remorse, no concern in what was passing—quite indifferent as to the nature of Christ's character, or whether it was a just or unjust sentence which they were executing. This prayer was heard by them, and for them this

prayer was offered, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

Then we have the general multitude. They were ignorant, fanatical, fickle. They had shouted a few days before, "Hosanna! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!" For a while they had been on the side of Jesus, and the rulers were afraid of them; but the tide of popular favour has suddenly turned, and under the influence of the priests and religious teachers, the multitude are loud in demanding the crucifixion of Christ. Of them it might be said most truly, "They know not what they do." As little had they known what they did when they wished to take Him by force and make Him a king: they knew not how shallow was the honour they would have conferred on Him, to make Him a king merely because He had multiplied their loaves. Christ could not have His greatness or His kingdom to rest on the power to bestow bread. They had not known the nature of the honour they conferred on Him when they cut down palm-branches from the trees and strewed them in the way, for they had been in ignorance of the real character of His person and His kingdom. And now they were as truly ignorant of the dishonour which they were showing Him—knowing something, but not knowing everything; and, in so far as their ignorance was concerned, Christ's prayer

is a prayer on their behalf—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Guiltiest of all the groups around the cross were the Jewish priests and religious guides of the people. They came nearest of all to knowing what they were really doing on that day. They had desired the result before, and had plotted together to consider how it might be brought about: and now they had gained their end. His blood was on their heads, and they had condemned Him "without a cause." But even for them there was an open door for escape. They were the victims of prejudice and bigotry; and there were amongst them men less guilty, less conscious of wrong-doing, than others. Some of them doubtless thought that they were doing God service; some of them doubtless believed that this man on the cross was a blasphemer. We know that afterwards "a great company of the priests became obedient to the faith;" many of them found forgiveness, many of them looked back in memory to this day and to this act with bitterness and pain; and at the time, they were unconscious of the nature of the deed which they were inciting, and of which they were the responsible authors.

"They know not what they do." Not only was the full nature of the deed unknown to them—the actors in it—but it was unknown to those who were

spectators, and who mourned and lamented what was done. The disciples, to whom the death of Jesus was the loss of a friend and trusted teacher, did not know the greatness of the crime. They knew much, they felt much; but even they could form but a faint conception of the effect of this act on all future time. Around the cross were loving friends. The mother of Jesus, and those women who had ministered to Him, knew something of what was being done. To them it was an event which overshadowed all their human life and darkened it; in their eyes the action of the rulers, and soldiers, and multitude appeared one of infinite heartlessness and cruelty; it was the violent slaying of one dear to them as life, snatched away from their affections and their society. Had they been asked what was done, this might have been their reply. But neither disciples nor friends, neither the mother of our Lord herself nor those her companions who stood beside the cross, could have accurately gauged the extent of the crime which was committed under the name of authority and law. Only one on earth—and He the great sufferer Himself—saw and felt the depth of that evil out of which this act proceeded. In this one act was concentrated the enmity of sin—the sin of the world—to all that is good and pure in God. The eternal difference between good and evil was revealed there. There was

gathered up as in a point the envy of narrow minds against whatsoever is noble and generous; there was the natural outcome of revenge, and malice, and scorn, against meekness and gentleness of character. It was not that the actors in that scene were worse than many others before and since; perhaps they were not. The faces on which Christ looked down were not the faces of a savage mob who had no feelings of tenderness and no human sympathies. The foremost, the leaders, the most conspicuous in the scene, were the religious worshippers who frequented the Temple, who offered sacrifices, who went away from the spot and sat down at the Passover supper to commemorate the deliverance of their fathers from Egyptian bondage. But their act was the symbol and the expression of the power of evil against goodness; it was for all time a proof that the essence of evil is utterly hostile to good, that it aims at the destruction of whatever can be good or do good. The cross is for ever the sign of the world's darkest crime: it reveals what is lying at the root of all sin; and it opens up the nature of that dread conflict which is ever going on between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of God.

Christ's prayer to His Father is to be regarded in the further light of a declaration of forgiveness, and an assurance of it. He always spoke the words

which His Father gave Him to speak ; and His prayers are more than a mere request—they are for us a testimony that what is asked is granted. “Father, forgive them,” means not only a wish that they may be forgiven ; it is also spoken to the world, and it means, “My Father shall forgive.” The prayer rose out of the spirit of forgiveness in His own heart. It is as if He had said, “I forgive them ; and now, Father, do Thou forgive them.” This declaration of forgiveness of His enemies stands out most prominently as a fact of Christ’s character and life. He had made it in other forms before. He had said more than once to men and women in their sorrow and bodily suffering, “Thy sins be forgiven thee.” He had said, when instituting the feast of the Lord’s Supper, “This is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” And this same truth, declared already in word and symbol, He now utters from the cross, in the form of a prayer to His Father, with whom He was one in purpose and in spirit. And so the thought of the cross, whilst it brings up before us the worst features of human life and nature, is for us the perpetual remembrancer of forgiveness and compassion. Christ’s prayer is Christ’s will ; His intercession is not the utterance of a kindly heart only, it is the assurance of a divine truth respecting God. It is a declaration of hope, and implies that

if they had known it they would not have been guilty of so great a sin. Jesus Christ declares in these words that when this ignorance of theirs has given place to knowledge of what they have done, they will repent of the evil of their actions, and find mercy.

Forgiveness is easier for God to give than for man to take. Forgiveness cannot be received by every one. If a man says he forgives me, I can only accept his word if I believe that I need his forgiveness,—in other words, if I am conscious that I have offended him and done something wrong. If I am in my own mind sure that I have not injured him, I decline to place myself on the footing of a forgiven man. I put away his forgiveness, I refuse to take the benefit of it, and I stand towards him as one claiming to have as much right to forgive him as he to forgive me. And if we transfer this comparison from earth to heaven, and inquire into the forgiveness which comes from God, we shall find that the only channel through which we can receive it is by accepting forgiveness as men who have done wrong, and who know the wrong they have done, and have confessed it and hated it.

The prayer could not be fulfilled—that is, those who were engaged in the act of crucifixion, and who were putting Jesus to death, could not be in a position to accept forgiveness—*until* they knew

something of what they had done. And the more they came to know the greatness of their crime, with the more eagerness would they receive the word of forgiveness. God's free forgiveness does not stop with the first moment when it is accepted. It could not be received at all unless it was believed to be needed; and it was not there and at that moment that the prayer was fulfilled, nor was it on any one day of life. It was at Pentecost, and ever afterwards as they came, one by one or in groups, acknowledging that they had come to perceive what a wicked deed they had done, that they derived the fruit of this prayer and were forgiven.

There are many who have passed a long way through the journey of life before they find out what they have been doing. Youth has often to pass into age before a man truly says, "Remember not the sins of my youth;" the hour of anger has to pass away before a man hears the voice of conscience, "Doest thou well to be angry." Perhaps it is only to-day that we see yesterday's faults, and not until another year may we see the faults of this; the scales fall away from our eyes, and we marvel that follies which are now so plain were not observed by us; we wonder how it was possible for us to do what we did, and not see its true character all the while. Conscience does not arouse us, and it is often not until the

voice of memory cries aloud that the soul of a man is awakened, and his past life looks to him as if he had been walking in his sleep. Is it not time for every one to bestir himself, and ask whether he knows what his present life and actions mean?

But there is another turn which we may give to the words. We may accept them as expressing our own spirit and our own life. And until we have received them into our hearts as the law of our own being, we have failed to see their true beauty and power. As He was in the world, so are we in the world. As He was misunderstood, so let us make up our minds to be misunderstood; and as He, even when undergoing some of the greatest bodily sufferings, ascribed the cruelty and sin of the action to ignorance of its real nature, so let us with kindred charity interpret words and acts which have wounded our spirits,—let us believe that under the growth of light and knowledge the hearts of men whom we are tempted to regard with anger will be softened; and so let us say of all who have offended us, “Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.”

The Rough Places made Plain.

“ And the rough places plain.”—ISAIAH xl. 4.

THE whole of this passage is in the New Testament applied to the office and work of John the Baptist. He applies it, indeed, to himself; and he says that his great task was to prepare the world for the coming and for the teaching of Jesus Christ. The words are very descriptive. They point to the removal of all kinds of difficulties out of the way, and to the preparation of the world for the kingdom of God.

But the work which was undertaken by John the Baptist in his day, in relation to the personal coming of Jesus Christ, may be taken in a wider sense. Though it applied to him, it did not apply to him only. The words before us were words which had a meaning from the time they were spoken. They had a meaning in Isaiah's time, and all through the centuries from that day till the dawn of Christianity. They have a meaning yet, and they may be

applied to everything which removes hindrances and makes the way of life and goodness more smooth and easy.

I. We may take this to be, in outline, the description of God's work with our world and with mankind, regarded as a preparation for the future. It is the voice of history, the voice of nature, the voice of science, the voice of revelation. The present is a preparation for the future, as the past was a preparation for the present, and as the future will be a preparation for a still coming and greater future.

We know the history of religion; how slow its progress—how for centuries it was only successful in casting down obstacles, and preparing the hearts of men for the entrance of a faith which was worthy of its Author. It required not the labours of one prophet like John only, but the labours of many generations of prophets, to prepare for the advent of Jesus Christ. Religion passed through numerous forms before it arrived at that form which Christ gave it. The whole government of God in ancient times—under patriarchs and lawgivers, and judges and kings and prophets—was an introduction to a more spiritual and exalted form of religion, which should spring up under the teaching of Jesus Christ.

And as this was the work of God in the reli-

gious thought and life of man, so was it the work of God in the world. The kingdom of heaven did not come until the world was in a measure ready for it. The greater portion of the earth was brought under one empire; the language of one people was the language for many nations; the various regions of the earth—east and west, in Europe and Asia and Africa—were brought nearer to one another than they had been before. And there was free and open intercourse between them, so that the preachers of the Gospel of the kingdom of God might be scattered everywhere, making known the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and proclaiming that there was neither Greek nor Jew, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, in Christ, but that all were one. Mountains had been levelled, valleys exalted, nations amalgamated; the barriers arising from unintelligible speech in a great measure removed; the Old Testament had been translated into the language which all educated men understood and used; and the teachers of Christianity could find access to learned and unlearned Greek and Roman over the length and breadth of the Roman dominions. The physical hindrances to their journeys were removed, the social hindrances were removed, the national hindrances were removed, and a highway was made ready for the preachers of Christianity—literally and figuratively, the rough places were made plain.

II. And if we see the course of God's work with man in the first introduction of the Gospel to the world, so I think we may say that this is an index to the course of His providence in every age and country. And this lesson, I think, may be learned—that in all cases the spiritual is above the material; and that all progress and improvement in the material world are but means to an end, and are intended to serve far higher interests.

We never cease glorying in the remarkable advances which have been made during this century in the knowledge of the physical laws of the world, and in the conquest of matter to man's uses. It does not become us to undervalue this progress. But it is unwise and unsafe to rest in this material good, and to be satisfied with it. It would be worse than unwise to leave men to think that, because they had forced the earth to yield new powers for the benefit of mankind, and because they could do what their fathers could not do, nothing else remained to be done. All these benefits of rapid intelligence, of conveniences, of comforts, are but the removal of hindrances out of the way of the progress of what is spiritual and divine. If they leave men devoid of better aims—if they leave us selfish, earthly, false—they are no blessings after all! If we use the gifts of nature and of invention and of

discovery merely to attain our own ends, and if there is no growth of the spirit of truth and charity, we have gained nothing: we have merely added to our former powers the power to increase our selfishness. But such is not the use for which these new acquisitions are designed. If there are more facilities for reaching the human mind by thought and speech or writing, all the more carefully ought every one who has influence over his fellows to see that that influence is wholesome, and not hurtful. If there is now a tenfold greater increase in our insight into the works of nature, if we have a fuller knowledge of the past, all the more ought we to take care that nothing darken or pollute that intellect which has grown so much the richer; and if there is a more abundant opportunity for gratifying the affections of the heart by frequent communication and friendly intercourse, all the more should we strive to keep the source of these affections pure from every evil passion, otherwise all the vast changes in human life and human learning have been of no avail to help on the kingdom of God. The material is the servant of the spiritual. What John the Baptist was to Christ, such is all the world to the Christ. All nature was a preparation for Him, all knowledge, all discovery. The world did not see this at the time; but the fact is true

for all that. People say that the growth of human wisdom and the increase of human blessings are adverse to the Gospel; but on looking back on history we see that all these things were in the hands of God, and were all made to prepare the way for the kingdom of God. So is it, and so ought it ever to be. The spiritual is above the material; and the great object of all life is to increase the amount of spiritual power, and to use all ordinary and material gifts to this end.

III. Consider, again, the influence of Christianity in making the path to goodness easier. He came "not to judge the world, but to save the world." He came not with rigid balance and measure to give every man his due, but rather with words of forgiveness on His lips to encourage those who were weary of sin, and wished to find their way back.

"Hath no man condemned thee? Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more." These were words which brought home to the heart of a penitent that the door to restoration was not shut,—these were words which made the crooked straight and the rough places plain, and by such words and by such encouragement He kept a human soul from sinking in despair.

"Make haste and come down," He said to Zaccheus,

“for to-day I must abide at thy house;” and by restoring him to the society from which he had been thrust out He made the way of life plainer, and helped a man who wished to stand fast in righteousness.

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.” This was levelling the rough path which His apostle would have to tread. And when Christ said to Peter at the sea-shore of Gennesaret, “Lovest thou Me?” after Peter had forsaken and denied Him, and in reply to Peter’s confession, added, “Feed My lambs,” “Feed My sheep,” it was a word of forgiveness and peace which made all labour easy for ever afterwards.

IV. This, too, is our work as Christians in the world and for the world. This is part of our task for those who are finding the road to goodness and right living hard and rough. Each of us has something in his power to prepare the way for the kingdom of God in the lives and hearts of others. We can by word or deed, or at least by example, help those who are ready to stumble, and perhaps bring to a better mind those who are in the wrong.

To many, the difficulties of a right life are very great, and it is no easy task for them to carry it out. Everything is against them: training, circumstances,

companions, habits—all are against them. Their earliest associations are with evil; they have no pure memories of early days; they were reared amidst ignorance, intemperance, crime: nothing is in their favour. From their youngest years they have been familiar with evil. It comes to them naturally to deceive, to lie, to do all manner of misdeeds; they have not been taught to restrain temper or tongue; they have not been used to kindly treatment, and they do not know what it is; and, indeed, they could hardly believe in it, or suppose that it was real, if they met with it. Instead of gentle words and affection, they have been governed by angry threats and curses and blows. They know hunger and cold, and discomfort and pain; they have learned to look on society as their enemy, and law as a mere force, without justice or reason. How is it possible for children and boys brought up under such influences to find the right road in the world? How is it possible for them to enter into the tasks of human life, and to observe the rules of order and truth and honesty? How can such a youth ever open into a manhood of worth or goodness? The child of ignorance and neglect has no chance in life: he is hardly made for life; he is not fitted for taking his place in the ranks of responsible and well-living men. The road to honesty and in-

dust, not to speak of the higher road to a spiritual and religious life, is steep and difficult, and it must be prepared and levelled for him. He must be helped by education, by guidance, by living examples of affection and well-doing. Society, Christian Society, the Church, must come to his aid: the spirit of Christian zeal and brotherhood must come to his aid, and the individual exertion of self-forgetting men and women must be given to make the path straight and plain: otherwise the neglected child will grow up into the hardened and depraved man. And this, to do the Churches of Christ justice, is precisely the line in which for many years they have been advancing. There are other lines, too, in which they have been moving; but I think it is not vain boasting to say of the Churches of Christ in this country that, both as Churches and as individuals, they have been for years interesting themselves in schools, reformatories, asylums for the weak, the blind, the deaf, the diseased. And what is all this but doing the work of Christ, the work of prophets and evangelists, the work of the Gospel, preparing a highway, helping those who cannot walk, making the rough places plain, making it easier for a man to stand in goodness and truth?

It is said that in the old days of Israel, when the cities of refuge existed, to which the manslayer might flee until his case had been decided, the roads to

these cities were made with the greatest care; that ravines were crossed by bridges; that finger-posts were set up all along the road, so that no one fleeing for refuge might miss his way. Whether it was so or not, the tradition has its lesson and its sacred meaning. The lesson is, that the path backward from a life of sin and danger to a life of holiness and safety should always be kept open and clear. The sacred meaning of such a tradition is, that no hindrance should be placed in the sinner's return to penitence and reformation; that no obstacle should be cast in his way when he wishes to return to God in true contrition, and in a true spirit of sincerity. You may test his sincerity if you choose, but it is well not to make his restoration to social position an impossibility, otherwise he will lose all hope, and will grow worse and worse. God has given to every man more or less the power to bind and to loose; to forgive and to withhold forgiveness; to welcome the returning penitent and to frown upon him; to restore the outcast and to keep him an outcast still. The power of absolution from sin which is claimed by some priests resides, not in the office of the priesthood, but in the spirit of priesthood and brotherhood, which every individual Christian more or less shares. The gift of imparting a sense of restoration to the privileges of Christian fellowship is placed in some

measure in the heart of every one, and it depends on every one, and especially on every one who has been personally wronged, whether he shall help or hinder the individual who has wronged him to regain peace, when he confesses his fault and to the utmost of his power seeks to make reparation.

After all is done, however, both for nations and individuals, there will be difficulties to overcome. You can never for yourselves, or for those whom you most love, so arrange things that all personal need for care and effort shall cease. There will be for every man the cross to carry, and for many men the thorn to trouble them. Each individual will have his personal warfare, his own battle to fight, and his own burden of pain, or doubt, or bitterness to bear. It is in vain you try to make of earth a paradise—in vain you seek to make the path through life one of perfect ease and quiet. There are troubles in the lot of the most favoured; there are cares where no one would suspect them: and when the roughest places have been made plain, you may still have reason to watch and labour and be on your guard. We are to walk by faith and not by sight to the very end: and even at the end there comes a rough passage from this life to the one beyond which has never been made wholly plain. One and another, and many, have felt that its darkness was lightened, and

its loneliness cheered, by the thought of what Christ has been, and of what He has said and done ; but still that road remains rough and lonely, and it appals stout and brave hearts, and unmans those who are strong. It is not to be expected that any man of thought or sensibility should face that great journey without an inner shrinking from the inevitable future. And yet even that terrible road is divested of what, in older days, scared the hearts of good men ; and there is a promise and an assurance given that there shall be light in darkness, and that the future shall not be wholly an object of terror. God will mingle hope with fear. He will hold the hand of the trembling child, and He will discover to the heart of those who rest on Him ground of confidence and peace. How many are there at this moment, in all parts of Christendom, who are confessing this truth, and who are acknowledging that the stone has been rolled away ; that the darkness has been scattered ; that the voice of Christ has been heard, and the peace of Christ felt ? Even so. “ The rough places plain ” is the story of God’s providence—of His gospel. It is the history of His Church ; it is the voice of experience in the heart and life ; and it is the hope of the humble believer in life and in death alike.

The Indelibility of Sin.

“My sin is ever before me.”—PSALM li. 3.

THIS Psalm comes home to every penitent. It is so true to life, so true to the inner experience of the heart. You hear it read, you use it in worship, and you read it quietly and when you are alone, and each time some expression strikes you afresh, as if you had not thought of it before. When a man is in a mood of deep reflection, and when for some reason or other he is brought to think seriously over some part of his life which was wrong, and which has taken a deep hold of his memory, the words of this Psalm seem to clothe themselves with new vigour; it looks to him as if the writer had been acquainted with him, and had known what was in his mind. One sees how in all ages and under every form of outward service the spirit of true religion has been the same. In all ages the human heart has been what it now is; and all that agitates it, and all that soothes it, has been what at the present moment it can feel

to be true. It is about three thousand years since the Psalm was written. During the greater part of that long period it has been in use in the services of religion, Jewish or Christian; in almost every language of the world it has been read and sung and pondered, in public and in private; and during all that time it has touched millions of hearts, and neither race nor language nor religious form have hindered it from penetrating into the inmost depths of human life and feeling.

At first sight it may appear as if there were a tone of exaggeration in some of the words of this Psalm. But the Psalm, it is to be considered, is the expression of deep or impassioned feeling. To an uninterested onlooker, all human passion, whether of anger or sorrow or pleasure, will always appear exaggerated. Excitement of every sort looks unnecessary when you are indifferent to that which gives rise to it; and religious feeling will always appear too strong, if not quite uncalled for, when the observer has no experience of his own which corresponds to it. But when a man's conscience awakens to the facts of his own personal history, and when his eyes are opened to see things in their true light, no language seems too strong: his emotions are stronger than any language which can be used, and he knows well that his words have been only touch-

ing the surface when to others they seem to express the very depths of inward feeling.

“My sin is ever before me.” I desire to make this statement as general as possible, and not to confine it to the instance in which it was first uttered. In one sense no single thought or subject can be perpetually in a man’s mind. Nobody needs to be told that. The stormiest heart has moments when the tempest is hushed. The most sorrowful life has moments or hours when the weight of the great sorrow is not present, and the man whose conscience is most deeply burdened with guilt has times of calmness and peace. We all know that; and no ordinary reader will, on this point, fall into error, or suppose that at every instant of time the sin is before the mind and heart of the penitent. Every one who reads the language of the Psalmist understands it to mean that compunction for sin is not a momentary feeling which passes away like a shooting pang, but that it is deep and abiding, coming back and back again like the gnawing sensation of some bodily disease which cannot be wholly cured. “My sin is ever before me” is a truth which every one may well accept. Though the presence of the sin and its bitter memories are often swallowed up by other thoughts and occupations, the general truth remains, that in the heart and mind of a man who is really sorry for

his sin, the recollection of it never dies out; he is reminded of it continually. Everything helps to keep the memory of it alive, and to keep genuine sorrow for it fresh in the heart.

This ineffaceable character of sin arises from the nature of moral evil itself. It is like a disease which takes hold of the life and enters into the very fibres and blood. There are many metaphysical discussions as to what sin is, and where it has its seat, and how it is transmitted: there are problems also which carry us much further back, and force on us the dark and mysterious question how it ever arose. But the discussion of such questions does not help us much; nor are they ever likely to be solved. It is not probable that any theory on the origin and transmission of evil will ever be framed which will satisfy the world. But whatever be its origin and its nature, we cannot deny that it is here, that it is within us, and that in unnumbered ways it makes its presence felt. The same experience tells us that it is part of ourselves, and that it gives a colour and tone to our lives too decided to be ignored. The act which has been done, the word which has been spoken, and even the thought and desire which have found an entrance into the soul, have made their character felt in the spirit; and by their very nature, their effects are lasting. The sins which a man has committed, especially

the sins which stand out conspicuously and come to the surface, are no longer detached from his own conscience and memory, but are inwoven with his being, and cannot be separated from it. They are ever present to remind him of his folly or incapacity or guilt—just as the disease which a man has caught in brain or lung or nerve is ever before him, in this sense, that its existence is manifested on every occasion when excitement or fatigue or cold, or any other circumstance, occurs to test his bodily powers. “My disease is ever before me,” every patient will say, even when for the moment he is free of conscious infirmity or pain—“my disease is ever before me; for though I am at any particular time perfectly untroubled by it, yet the instant I move my limbs or exert my brain, I become aware of my infirmity, and I need no other proof of the fact that I am unsound.” “My sin is ever before me,” the penitent soul may say to itself; “for I cannot throw off old memories, or be blind and deaf to inner warnings. I cannot help feeling the bitter effects of old errors and follies, of old habits and acts, which cast a dark shadow over my life, and remind me continually that it is I myself who have offended.”

The nature of sin itself, affecting, as it does, the character of the inner life, keeps it in sight, and prevents it from disappearing.

There are some circumstances, however, which might seem to destroy this permanent sense of evil.

1. Repentance is one of these. One might suppose that if once a man heartily regretted a wrong act or course, it would cease in any sense of the word to be his. He has disowned it. He has virtually said—"I had to do with it formerly, but I have not to do with it now. At one time it was my act, my crime, my wilful fault; now I abhor and repudiate it, and I utterly reject the spirit which moved me to commit it." And certainly, in the best sense of the word, old faults and old errors cease to be ours if they have passed away and lost their hold on us. But it is not possible to forget our identity with our former selves; it is not possible to think of what we were and of what we did without pain. We have broken off from old habits and old deeds, but we cannot break the link which binds us to the past in thought and feeling; we cannot destroy the essential unity of the old and the new, or cease to regret what was done, and to suffer remorse and shame for it. No man can ever come to think lightly of a deed of wrong or cruelty, or falsehood or impurity, even though he now detests it; no man can ever thoughtlessly say, when the memory of it comes up, "Let it go," "What matters it to me?" "It has ceased to be mine." No; whilst in the best sense of the word it has ceased

to be his, because he renounces the state of mind in which it could ever become possible again, yet in another sense of the word, that very change of heart and life deepens in his heart the sense of humiliation and grief that it should ever have been his at all. In fact, it is just because he has repented of it that his former evil deed is hated so much, and just because he has repented of it that he sees its baseness so clearly, and feels with such keenness its guilt.

The fact of repentance, then, though it might at first seem to take away all present misery on account of the past, and to put the sin out of sight, has not that effect; and the man who has most truly repented of his sins is the man who, by that very repentance, has gained the deepest insight into the evil of sin, and learned to know how much sorrow and regret it produces.

2. Again, it may be thought that the pardon of sin would destroy that perpetual bitterness of its remembrance, and that no man who had really been forgiven could say, "My sin is ever before me." This is very much the same difficulty as the one I have already referred to, for it is very much the same thing to say a man has repented, as to say he has been forgiven. But to some it may appear a different matter; and some may suppose that, when

a sin is pardoned, it is taken out of the list of things which cause regret and trouble. If God has forgiven, people may say—If He has, in the language of Scripture, cast our sins into the depths of the sea, why should we fret about them, as if they could be brought to the surface again and laid to our charge? It seems a logical enough argument, but after all, it does not come to much; for human feeling and human remorse are not governed by figures of speech, and the casting of sins into the depths of the sea, we may rest assured, means simply divine compassion,—it means that, so far as our divine Judge is concerned, He will never charge us with them again. But we have still our own memories and our own nature to reckon with, and as long as it is so, we can never cease to look with a sense of shame and humiliation on ourselves and our past history, even though we believe in our hearts that our sin is forgiven. “Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned,” says the sacred writer; and it might be thought that if He against whom only he had sinned had freely pardoned, there was no more to fear, no other to regard, and that the sin might be dismissed from mind and memory, from conscience and feeling. But our own nature bears witness against such reasoning as this. Our own human experience teaches us that in ordinary life the offence which haunts us longest is the

one which we have committed against the man who has forgiven us, and who has assured us that he will bear no grudge against us for the wrong we have done him. Indeed this is almost the only offence that torments us. If a neighbour refuses to accept our apology and to pardon what we have done, we feel as if he and ourselves were on the same level: there is nothing more that we can do than to confess our fault and make what reparation is possible. If he declines all advances, what further effort can we make? we have done our utmost, and we feel as if the offence were an offence no longer. Nay, on the contrary, we feel that we have a counter-claim; we feel as if we, in our turn, had cause of complaint against him. But if he has forgiven us, he has put us deeper than ever in his debt. If ever a man says with greater grief and self-reproach than at any other time, "My sin is before me," it is when he considers that his sin has been committed against one who has spoken the word of forgiveness and cast that sin away. At no time, therefore, is it more true that our sins are ever before us than when we have the deepest assurance of divine tenderness and compassion.

3. There is still another circumstance which might seem to justify our forgetting or leaving out of view our sin, and that is when it has been visited with

chastening or punishment. But if neither repentance nor pardon will remove it out of our memory or conscience, neither, finally, will punishment.

There are some men—and notably the criminal class in society—who fall into the notion that, having suffered for their crime, they are for ever quits. They have paid their debt, as they suppose, and now they owe nothing to God or society, to human or divine law. This crime weighs no longer on their spirits, and they are free.

I need not discuss that point, or argue about it, believing that no one here will really confound two things which are so unlike. There is a voice within us which whispers to us, after all our sufferings from our wrong-doing, that it has not ceased to be ours. You can all see at a glance that punishment has really done nothing to remove the sinfulness of an act or of a course of action, and never can. The fever and the physical pain which follow indulgence, intemperance, and excess, can never compensate for sin or prove an equivalent for it in the sight of God or man. Penalty for evil-speaking has not taken away the spirit of uncharitableness and malice. Imprisonment for crime has not rooted out of the heart the violence and the fraud in which the crime consisted. A whole lifetime of shame and dishonour cannot atone for the deeds of guilt which have deprived the evil-

doer of liberty ; nor would the shedding of his blood expiate his crime.

The punishment which God has deposited in the constitution of His creatures, and which needs not the hand of man to inflict it, is God's voice in nature and in human life, speaking in a tone which cannot be suppressed, and telling us that no divine law can be violated with impunity—telling us also that punishment, however heavy and long-continued, does not touch the real seat and cause of the transgression, and it may be measured out to the full without destroying the sin against which it is aimed. Nor can the severest sentence passed by a human judge destroy the vice which it condemns, or cause it to cease troubling and tormenting the conscience of the prisoner.

“My sin is ever before me” is the voice of true contrition and humility. There is the deed, or crime, or course of sin, “ever before me.” Repentance has not destroyed it ; pardon, though it has brought consolation, has not destroyed it ; nor can punishment blot out its bitter memories.

We could not imagine it possible that the Psalmist should forget his great sins ; we could not think it possible that Peter should forget his denial of Christ, or Paul his persecution of the Christians, or any good man his great faults. Still less could we suppose it

possible that they should wish to forget them, and to live as beings who had never fallen and had never been restored. So far as the future world is shadowed forth by the character of those who have lived in it more than in the present, there will not be there a total forgetfulness of past failures and sins. We read that in the midst of the throne was seen a lamb as it had been slain, and that the song of praise runs in strains like this, "Thou hast redeemed us." And so long as the remembrance of redemption remains, there will remain the remembrance of that from which we have been redeemed.

What various memories there must be of wrong and of wrong-doing in the hearts of men who are no longer to be included amongst wrong-doers! Who can calculate the regrets and compunctions and self-reproofs which are stirred anew when the spirit is probed, and the long-buried deeds of other days are recalled? Within each heart there is something, within some hearts there are many things, which cause inward searching and self-condemnation. I do not ask what they are, I do not wish to know them, I do not seek to uncover them, and I do not desire that any one should by force or as a duty think long upon them. In a right state of spirit, those grave and bitter thoughts of the past spring up spontaneously, and they must be looked at

solemnly. I do not ask you to invite them, still less to thrust them at once away.

The great object I have in turning your attention to such a subject to-day is, that when such thoughts, so true to our nature and to our better nature, arise, all who are visited with them may turn them to their right end, and may be led with more earnest purpose to abandon every habit and deed which have in them the germs of future sorrow and bitterness.

The Revelation of the Son of Man.

“And when He was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, He answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation.”—LUKE xvii. 20.

IN this discourse of Jesus Christ there are not a few difficulties, and the various topics referred to have received different interpretations. I cannot pretend to offer an exposition to which no objection could be taken, or which would meet every difficulty. I shall deem it sufficient to take a general view of the subject embraced in these verses, and to draw from it one or two lessons which I believe to be fairly deducible.

According to the evangelist, there are here really two separate addresses. The first, in verses 20, 21, is delivered to the Pharisees who demanded of him when the kingdom of God should come, and to whom He answered, “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.” With these words His reply, so far as the

Pharisees were concerned, stops. He says no more to them. What He says further on this subject is said to His disciples. He does not indeed, in so many words, speak of "the kingdom of God" again; nor does He say that He is foretelling the kingdom of God and its approach; but when He uses the expression, "And they shall say to you, See here! or, see there!" we perceive that the same topic on which He had been questioned by the Pharisees is still before His mind.

The manner in which He speaks of this subject might be supposed to indicate that the disciples were to be on the earth in the day when the Son of Man should be revealed. But we need not strictly insist on that construction of the words. Indeed it seems probable that the whole question as to time is left intentionally vague and undetermined; and further, it would seem as if the very nature of the revelation of the Son of Man were left equally vague and undetermined. At first He speaks of "the Son of Man in His day" (verse 24); and then (verse 26) of "the days of the Son of Man;" and again (verse 30), "of the day when the Son of Man is revealed."

The days of the Son of Man in His day were the presence and life of Jesus amongst the generation when He lived. These days were fast hurrying on:

they would soon be ended; and when they were ended, the disciples, He says, would often express a wish to see them back again,—to see Him once more amongst them. “The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and ye shall not see it. And they shall say to you, See here! or, see there! go not after them, nor follow them. For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of Man be in His day.” This refers evidently to what He said on another occasion, that false Christs should arise, and that many should proclaim the return of Christ. Our Lord warns His disciples on this matter, that they may not now be deceived, for there will be no doubt about the event when it arrives, whatever it is, and whenever it may come; and then He instances other cases in which events have come suddenly.

So far all seems plain. So far our Lord has made His disciples understand that His personal presence on the earth is a matter in regard to which they are not to listen to the rumours which they may hear at any future time.

But when we ask, further, what kind of revelation He refers to when He says, “Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed,” and what

that revelation of the Son of Man imports, there is an obscurity in the words in which we would seek an explanation.

The revelation of the Son of Man is an event which takes more shapes than one in this passage. According to verse 31, the revelation of the Son of Man implies a time of great danger, and yet not of hopeless danger. It implies a period of danger in one place and of the possibility of escape in another place—of safety in the field and not in the house, of safety without but not within. The revelation of the Son of Man thus takes the shape of a critical period, such as might happen during a siege, or the destruction of a dwelling or of a whole city—where life would be in peril within the walls, but might be saved beyond the walls, and where safety lay only in immediate flight: lingering would be ruin; a quick departure from the doomed city the only way of escape.

That is one aspect of the revelation of the Son of Man. And Christ exhorts His disciples, and all who hear Him, to escape with their lives—to escape with the higher life, the better life. Let not the love of property interfere with the love of life; lose all rather than lose life; and let not the love of the lower life interfere with the preservation of the higher life—the life of the spirit, the true life of

man. Lose life itself rather than lose that; for in preserving that, all is preserved.

Then our Lord speaks of the day of the Son of Man—or, altering the phraseology, of the night of the Son of Man—when He is revealed. In that night there shall be two in one bed—the one taken and the other left; two women grinding at the mill—the one taken and the other left; two men in the field—the one taken and the other left. It is a time of separation which is indicated; the figure of the siege disappears, and new figures take its place. It is a time, though not of apparent outward danger, yet of judgment; but on what principle the judgment takes place, these words do not of themselves determine. For aught that appears, it may be a separation of accident or of caprice; it is a separation, and that is all we know. But when the disciples say further, “Where, Lord?” He utters a proverb which casts light on the judgment, and also on the siege and separation: “Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together,”—a parable that may have been old or new, it matters not; the meaning is plain, and it is twofold. (1.) It evidently means that the judgment is one which is true to nature. It is the dead body on which the birds of prey settle; and wherever the dead body lies, thither do these birds of prey gather. Our

Lord gives in this figure or parable the principles on which the judgment or separation proceeds. It is the dead carcass on which the eagles prey. It is the corrupt city, the corrupt State, the corrupt heart, on which judgment is pronounced: the judgment is not one of accident or caprice, but of truth, of righteousness. That is the principle of separation and judgment. And (2.) in answer to the question "Where, Lord?" Jesus gives, I think, another lesson on this matter,—viz., that this revelation of the Son of Man is not a single and solitary act of judgment at some future and far-distant day, but that it is a revelation often made—made, now on a country, now on a people, now on a Church, now on a system. The revelation of the Son of Man is not a thing of time and place, it is an eternal law in the dispensation of God. It is a revelation seen in the fall of old empires, in the decay and ruin of States, in the overthrow of human powers, which die and grow corrupt. The judgment of God is proceeding every day; it is proceeding quietly and unseen. It is only now and then that men's eyes are open to behold it, and then the judgment is revealed. But it is not the less true that God's judgment proceeds day by day, whether it is seen and revealed or not. Corruption shall bring about its own recompense—not at a particular time or place; not in some one notable

instance years or centuries hence, but wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together. "Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there!"

These words of our Lord may serve as a warning against all rash and hasty conclusions as to the future. They teach us to reserve our judgment in regard to all passing events, and to wait patiently for the issue. It is very natural for men to try to forecast the future and to foretell what is coming. In all ages men have tried to do this, and in Christian countries many have sought to find in the Bible the means of calculating when the end of the world and of all things would take place; and in consequence, there has been much wrong interpretation of Scripture, much turning of it to a use for which it was never meant. Our Lord's words discourage, as it seems to me, this prying into the future with the desire to know when and how certain expected events shall take place. He teaches us to attach less importance to dates, and more importance to life and its great purposes. I think, then, that when we witness or hear of striking occurrences, we should endeavour to look at them as they are, and endeavour to find out what they really mean, instead of seeking to put them to a purpose which they never can be sure to serve. When you hear of wars or

famine, or floods or pestilence, regard them in their relation to the world, or those parts of the world where they occur, whether at home or abroad, and examine what they truly signify, and do not lose time and energy in the attempt to find a place for them in the region of prophecy. You will discover many homely as well as deep lessons in the events themselves. You will trace many things which would otherwise escape your notice to their true source; you will see how carelessness, selfishness, immorality, ignorance, are the true causes of many great calamities which are often classed amongst the mysteries of Providence; you will find that national sins breed national dishonour, and in the end national ruin; you will find that events which some look upon as signs and proofs of the fulfilment of prophecy and of a coming desolation, have written on them a much simpler truth—that they proclaim, to all who have eyes to read it, that no nation or class of men can despise God's great laws in the outer world, or in the world of the inner life, without reaping as they have sown.

Again, our Lord's words suggest to us the greatness and the importance of the spiritual kingdom of God. When Christ says, "The kingdom is within you," I understand his words to mean, not that the kingdom of God is hid within the soul, and is amongst

the secrets of the heart, but that the kingdom of God is amongst you, — ἐντὸς ὑμῶν — *i.e.*, already exists, has already come, and is already in operation, with its laws, its method, its rewards, its penalties. There was an eager desire to know something of the kingdom of God; but it was of another kingdom they were thinking, and not of the kingdom of God at all. Their minds were dwelling on a kingdom which they called the kingdom of God, but not on the kingdom which really belonged to God—the kingdom whose laws, if they would only consider it, might be seen in operation all around them. This kingdom is the spiritual kingdom of God, of which He is the Head and Ruler, which He directs day by day, and of which Jesus Christ on earth continually preached. “The kingdom of God,” said Jesus, “is amongst you,” is within your nation, within your reach; and the only reason why it was hid from them was, that they had not the power to see it, that they did not know where to look for it.

This kingdom of God is great and important. It may seem a mere truism to repeat that, but it is a truth which needs to be repeated, because there is a continual tendency to suppose that this kingdom of God is merely provisional,—*i.e.*, one which is a mere expedient for the time being, and is to be speedily removed; indeed, which in the nature of things

cannot continue long. The kingdom of God, which is amongst you, and which is in itself under God's government and care, is spiritual in its character. All its laws are spiritual, all its motives and influences are spiritual, and appeal to the spirit of man,—to his spirit, and not to his carnal judgment or mere love of sensation. And such a kingdom is of much more importance than one where you can see the face and hear the voice of the Ruler. A spiritual kingdom like that which now exists, and of which Jesus Christ is called the spiritual Head, is apt to be thought by us of less consequence than one which could be brought under the eye of man, and made palpable and plain to his bodily senses. A kingdom with a visible king, with a throne and a crown and a sceptre, may seem to some of more importance than one which can be comprehended only by the spirit of man. We may suppose that if, instead of throwing men back upon the spiritual laws of God, and on the eternal power of righteousness and love and truth, we could point men to the living Ruler, and bring them under the tribunal, and cause them to look with their eyes on His grandeur and His numerous retinue, something would be gained ; and we are disposed at times to wish that a change were made from the spiritual to the visible. We wish to see one of the days of the Son of Man. We wish at times that,

instead of the present method of trusting God and serving Him and loving Him, there were a vast temple in which His glory dazzled the sight, and in which the voice of the divine Majesty was audible; and we think it would be a change for the better. We imagine that, in such a case, goodness would be stronger and evil weaker; confusion would cease, order would prevail, all hearts be in their right place, and all persons do their right work. We suppose that if, instead of a Bible and a Church and a conscience, and a spiritual capacity to love truth and to yield to pure influences, there were enthroned on earth a Monarch whom all the world could look upon, Paradise would be restored, the serpent's poison extracted, the tempter's wiles conquered, the sinner's life amended, and his heart regenerated. And this is what we think of when we say, "When shall the kingdom of God appear?"

But are we sure that all this would follow the erection of such a throne—the advent of a Ruler like this? The sudden appearance of a mighty King, carrying the power of lightning, armed with authority, able to crush and to destroy all opposition, would indeed strike consternation into the human heart, and would bring to an end at once all the present influences which govern mankind. The entire system of training and discipline under which

the human spirit is here educated for God, would cease, and the life which is called the life of faith and patience and hope, the life of courage and strength, would be possible no longer; no longer would it be possible to grow up, as now, in Christian submission and in spiritual power. The whole system would be altered from a spiritual one to one of outward force and compulsion, or at least to one of almost mechanical obedience. In any case, it would not be the kingdom of God as it has existed in its essence for ages on earth; it would bear no resemblance to that kingdom of God which Christ established, and under which He Himself lived. Nay more—and this it is of importance to notice—I do not see how for such a kingdom as many desire and wish the training received in the present kingdom would be in any way a preparation. But without dwelling on this, I think that the important fact to remember is that the spiritual kingdom of God actually exists amongst us or within us. The importance of it is witnessed to by Christ Himself when He said, “It is expedient for you that I go away.” Not one of His disciples thought or understood that; they all thought it better for them that He should remain, that in His bodily presence He should be the Guide and Ruler of His Church. But He Himself knew how much better it would be for

them to have a training in His personal absence, and how much better it would be that they should learn to live by faith, and not by sight. By such a life—by a life which looks through the visible to the invisible, which sees the hand of an unseen Ruler and Lord everywhere,—by such a life shall we be best prepared for the revelation of the Son of Man, come as that may—now in one crisis of life, and now in another, or even at the last it must come in the final crisis, when the history of this earth shall be complete, and the purpose of God made manifest to all the universe.

Wishing a Sign from Heaven.

“The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired Him that He would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather ; for the sky is red : and in the morning, It will be foul weather to-day ; for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky ; but can ye not discern the signs of the times ? A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign ; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And He left them, and departed. And when His disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread. Which when Jesus perceived, He said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread ? Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up ? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up ? How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees ? Then understood they how that He bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.”—MATTHEW xvi. 1-12.

THESE verses contain numerous points which might deserve close attention, but I must pass over many of them. Our Lord in His teaching

was beset with two difficulties and hindrances—one in regard to His enemies the Pharisees and Sadducees, and one in regard to His own disciples. In both cases, though for different reasons, the value of His teaching was lost. His enemies outside of His own circle failed to derive benefit from His words and works; and to a certain extent so did His disciples, but not from the same cause. His enemies were filled with prejudice; they had shut their ears and their eyes, they had hardened themselves against Him, and consequently they could not comprehend His teaching aright. They did not examine it fairly; they perverted His words, His acts, and imputed wrong motives to all He said and did; and in such circumstances it was simply impossible that they could do justice to Him, or derive any good from Him.

The disciples, on the other hand, trusted Him and loved Him; they followed Him from no mean or selfish motive; they had left much, some of them had left everything, for His sake: but with all this singleness of purpose, there were hindrances also in their minds and hearts which prevented them from entering fully into the tone and spirit of His teaching, and from understanding, as they might otherwise have done, the entire meaning of His words.

It is on these two points that I shall say a few words. The kind of opposition or hindrance which

Jesus met in His teaching from His enemies is indicated in the opening verses of the chapter; the difficulty which our Lord often experienced in the case of His disciples is referred to further on, and may be stated in general as a want of sympathy, a shortcoming in the interest they ought to have felt in His great life-work.

I. "The Pharisees and Sadducees came, and tempting desired Him that He would show them a sign from heaven."

It is difficult to know what these critics and cavillers would have admitted to be "a sign from heaven." According to the evangelists, the Pharisees and Sadducees had seen various works of a remarkable and even miraculous kind performed by Jesus, but they still asked for a sign from heaven. They had seen Him cure the sick, restore the paralytic, and multiply the loaves; but in reference to each of these acts of power and mercy they had some fault to find, and they alleged some excuse for not accepting it as a sign from heaven. They did not take what we would account a miracle on the human body as a sufficient sign, but in the presence of many great and marvellous works they still said to Jesus, "Show us a sign from heaven."

Here we find the spirit which cannot see in Christ,

or in Christ's religion, its own value, and which is always going outside of it for some token or evidence of its worth. There are people to whom all religion is a thing outside of them; and they receive it, not because it meets any want in their hearts, or because they need it, but because it comes with an outside authority and show.

I daresay there are some who have often wondered why so much should be said in the New Testament about this matter, why Jesus should find fault with men for seeking a sign from heaven, and why afterwards Paul should blame the Jews for the same thing. What was there so far wrong in seeking a sign from heaven, that the people should be found fault with for demanding it? Now there are many things which people might be justified in not believing until they had seen some sign from heaven. But the great truths which Christ taught were truths which came home to the hearts and consciences of men. These need no sign from heaven or earth; they are their own witnesses to every man who hears them. When Christ taught the people, as He had just been doing, that the things which truly defiled a man were not the things he touched and ate, but the things which were in his heart, his thoughts and wishes, and the things he spoke and did, that teaching needed no sign, could have no sign, from heaven

greater than itself. And when He taught men the love of God, the love of their brethren, the duty of forbearance and forgiveness, these needed no sign from heaven; every one has in his own heart the sign of these, and an outward sign would only confuse him and turn away his mind from the true sign which proves such teaching to be true.

If you were to convince a man that he had done something wrong, and if you were to ask him to repent of the wrong, what would you say suppose he were to reply, "Show me a sign from heaven that I ought to repent"?

Suppose, again, a man were taken out of darkness and allowed to gaze round on hill and sky and sea, how would you receive his demand, "Show me a sign from heaven that these things are what they are"? The light in which he is living is the standing sign from heaven, the only one, and the best.

And in the same way, the only and the best sign from heaven in the things of the spirit, is the truth acting on the conscience and the heart. If a man can see nothing there, who can enlighten him? If you cannot make a man feel that purity is right and impurity is wrong, and that to love and trust God is his true nature, how are you to convince him of that by a sign in the sun or stars?

If a man can see no goodness in a good life, if he

can read the life of Jesus Christ and find in it no wisdom, no love, no power, no charm to draw him away from himself and from things mean and base, what possible sign can be given him in heaven that such a life is worth his study and imitation? If a man is always asking you for an outward sign to prove that a moral or religious fact is true, if he has no touchstone in his own inner life to which he can bring it, how is he possibly to find such a touchstone outside of him? When a man is for ever demanding a sign why he should believe the truth and do right, you can only refer him to his own inner sense of right and wrong, of truth and error; and if that has no force with him, you must cease to regard him as a man whose judgment in such matters is to be trusted.

This was the condition of those persons who came to Christ demanding of Him a sign from heaven. And His reply to them proceeds upon the fact that they had signs all around them for their guidance in religion, as truly as they had signs for their guidance in the common affairs of life. The colour of the sky at night or in the morning is a sign which you read, He says, and by which you judge of what kind of weather is coming, and what accordingly you may be prepared to do, whether in the field or on the sea. Look around you and see whether there are any similar signs in the world

which ought to prepare you for what is at hand, and for what is needed in things moral and spiritual. To read "the signs of the times" is so far the duty of every one who is interested in the history of mankind; to read the signs of the times is more especially the duty of all who have any influence, who can exercise any power, or who can in any way guide the tone of public sentiment. It was a duty in Christ's day; it is a duty now. To watch the conditions and changes of human thought and human necessities is, in an especial manner, the duty of the religious teachers and rulers of the Christian Church. Apart altogether from the consequences of public opinion, the study of human life is full of interest. The movements of human feeling, the currents of thought which are agitating the minds of men, form a subject which may well occupy the attention of every one who cares to see the world growing wiser or better; and to ascertain what are the spiritual wants of men is of more importance than to know all the conditions of the material world. Jesus Christ turns what is too often considered a secular object of inquiry into one of the most religious kind. It is too often taken for granted that the study of the signs of the times is not so much a religious as a political work. There is a large class of persons who set aside the task as one with which Christianity has

nothing to do. It has to do with the spiritual wants of men, and these are ever the same. So doubtless they are; but the forms of human society are perpetually shifting; each generation differs from its predecessors, and demands a treatment of its own. You cannot preach or speak to men in this century as you would have done in the first century, or the tenth, or the seventeenth, or any other. The same questions do not interest mankind to-day which interested them a hundred years ago, or fifty years ago. The world looks at politics, at religion, at social matters, in a different light. If any one will read the speeches or the sermons which were addressed to great audiences in the last century, he will find that there is no audience in our day to which they could be spoken with any power or profit. It is not because we are better, or wiser, or more learned, or of more refined taste; it is that we have yielded to the law to which all human things are subject. In a measure, we experience the same thing in our individual life; we change in our tastes, our ideas, our sense of what is needed for our mental and spiritual good. No man of ripe years would care now for much of the reading which charmed his boyhood. What is new and fresh comes home to our hearts, but the time comes when the freshness and novelty of other days grow commonplace. We

have exhausted all that they could give us, and we ask for something else—something which may afford us additional mental sustenance. And so it is with the world, and with the generations of the world. Some one has said that the discoveries of one age are the truisms of the next; and it would be folly to keep descanting on these discoveries after they have become truisms. The time may come round again when they will require to be brought forward in another aspect; but Christ's words take us to the root of human life and human thought, and force us to ask the question, What are the signs of the times, what does the world need, and how is the world to get what it needs?

It is in this point of view that we see how applicable were the words of Jesus Christ to the Pharisees and the Sadducees of His day. They ask of Him a sign from heaven; and He by His teaching in the world, as much as by His works, is giving them a sign which is really from heaven. And what is that sign? It is simply this, that Christ is meeting the true necessities of the human heart by what He has said and done. They say to Him, "How do we know that you are from heaven, that you have authority? show us a sign." And He answers, "Look at the world, discern its moral aspects, observe how men no longer can live on the traditions

of the elders, see how the human heart is reached by the voice of truth." Christ's teaching was in itself a sign from heaven. It was a sign which no man who looked on human society could afford to despise. It came home to men's hearts; it brought new life, new comfort, new sources of hope and strength to mankind.

II. On the part of disciples and friends, as well as enemies, there is often a misunderstanding of Christ's words. And this fact is illustrated here in a striking way. Jesus said to the disciples, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." What words could be simpler or more intelligible? But their simplicity depended upon the connection in which they were brought in. If the conversation had been one about principles or systems, or morals or teaching, then it had been hard for even the dullest mind to have misunderstood them, or to have mistaken the figure of speech employed; for every one was familiar with the meaning of the word "leaven" in the sense of corruption or error. On the other hand, if the disciples had been conversing about their supplies of food, and about the difficulty of finding it, one can see how naturally they would have supposed the warning of Jesus to refer to bread; and one can

suppose it possible that they should think He was cautioning them on that matter, or administering to them a quiet rebuke for omitting to provide for His wants and their own. But in the present case there was no conversation on either the one subject or the other. It was some hours since the conversation between Christ and His tempters had taken place regarding the sign from heaven; the subject had passed from the minds of His disciples, but it had not passed from His mind. The disciples had been thinking of other things, and had forgotten all about the want of sympathy between Christ and those who questioned Him; but the mind of Christ was full of it. The worldliness, or hypocrisy, or hard-heartedness of men who took no interest in the kingdom of God were before Him; and if the current of their thoughts had run in the same direction, His words would have found a natural response in their understandings, and their true meaning would have at once been apprehended. But when Christ broke silence and said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees," the disciples were taken by surprise. They did not at the moment connect His warning with any previous incident: the hardness of the Pharisees' hearts had not left on them the same sad and painful impression, and they were at a loss to comprehend what Jesus

meant by His warning words. They began to reflect what He could mean, and they thought that they had discovered the purpose of His warning. "It is," said they, "because we have taken no bread." Their minds were on a very different level; they were engrossed with things of a very different kind from any which were troubling Christ, and naturally they regarded His words from their own point of view, and interpreted His teaching through their own state of mind and feeling.

"Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of the Sadducees." I do not enter into detail in these matters. The plan which I have adopted in treating this subject does not require me to do so; and indeed it is of small consequence to us now what that leaven was, except in so far as we may learn to avoid its spirit for ourselves. It may be sufficient, however, to say that the caution which the apostles came to understand better, had reference to what is called the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. "The doctrine" may be best explained to be, not the views or opinions of the Pharisees and Sadducees, but the whole spirit and character of these different religious parties or divisions of the time. The Pharisees and Sadducees, as you are aware, differed widely from each other. Indeed they had very little in common. The Phari-

sees held to every part of the old law, with all the oral traditions which in the course of ages had gathered around it. The authority of this oral law the Sadducees denied. The Pharisees had come to place small and insignificant rules in the room of great moral and religious truths. The Sadducees were free from such trammels; but, on the other hand, they set aside the whole doctrine of a future and an unseen life. The two differed widely in opinion; but, as I said, it is not to the opinions which they held that Christ directs attention, but to the spirit and tone of their teaching and life. Both Pharisee and Sadducee had lost the earnestness and sincerity which are essential to a true life; and our Lord warns His disciples against their hypocrisy, their insincerity, their shallow and outside religion, their inward contempt of all that was really good and worthy in religion and in human life.

What is chiefly wanted to render religious teaching intelligible and valuable, is this spirit of sympathy between those who speak and those who hear. For want of this, much that would otherwise be plain is misunderstood altogether. Indeed you find often that it is not words, but thoughts and things, which are strange to men who do not enter into the spirit of them. Men take up a certain idea. They look at a truth from a particular point;

they have formed certain notions of it, and no matter what is said, they hear it all through these preconceived notions, and interpret it by their own thoughts.

In Christ's own case, consider how often He spoke of His own future. He told the disciples again and again what that future was to be; but it seemed to make no impression on their minds. He told them He was to suffer—He told them He was to die. But when suffering came—when death came—they were taken by surprise; they never looked for the one or the other, for they had formed their own conceptions of what He was to be.

In our generation, as in every other, teachers have come and gone whose full merits and qualifications have not been understood so long as they were with us. On looking back many years, most of us remember men to whom we listened with respect, perhaps even with a stronger feeling, but all the while we did not fully enter into their spirit; it was only as time advanced that the meaning and power of their life and thoughts began to tell on us, and we came to see that there was much in their words and modes of thought which at the first we did not adequately appreciate.

There are numerous hindrances, perhaps, in our own life and in its general spirit to the reception

of Christian teaching and the power of it. I am not putting myself on the one side and you on the other. It is hardly possible to treat a subject like this, indeed, without seeming to do so; but this is not my object. I join myself with you, and take with you the place which every human being, clerical and lay, ought to assume—the place of a disciple; and I have, I am sure, your assent to the fact, that what is needed to make us worthier disciples of the great Teacher and Lord is, that we have His cause nearer our hearts, so that we miss not the force and meaning of those lessons we get from His Scriptures and from the lips of those who speak in His name.

The impression which I wish to convey by all I have said is principally this—(1.) That we are to look for the great evidence of all religion in the religion itself—not in a sign from heaven, but in the sign which God has given already; or, as St Paul puts it, not to the commandment on stone, but to law written on the fleshy tables of the heart, and as it was put thousands of years ago, “Say not who shall go up to heaven or down to the deep, for the word is very nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart.” Believe that the light is its own best evidence, and that truth by its power

on the human soul is enough. And (2.) that sympathy with the Divine Teacher is required, in order to understand His teaching; and that this sympathy is best produced and kept strong by making the whole tone and spirit of His life the familiar tone and spirit of our own lives, and by taking to heart more than ever the great facts which are so prominent in the life and spirit of Jesus Christ.

The Presence of God.

“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded!” &c.—1 KINGS viii. 27, 28.

“Then answered the Jews, and said unto Him, What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things?” &c.—JOHN ii. 18-21.

IN this Book of Kings (chap. xx. 23) there is recorded a curious incident, which brings out the common ideas of the world in that day in regard to the religion of Judea. The King of Syria had been unfortunate in an invasion which he had made on the kingdom of Israel; he was defeated and driven back with great loss to his own country. In the following spring he was making preparations to renew his attack upon Israel, and his advisers came to him and said, “Their gods are gods of the hills, therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.” Acting on this counsel, the king of Syria arranged his forces

for carrying on war on the plains and not in the mountains.

This meagre idea of the God of Israel was treated by the religious men of Israel with contempt and indignation. "There came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the Lord, Because the Syrians have said, The Lord is God of the hills, but He is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand; and ye shall know that I am the Lord." The general idea of the world at that time regarding any object of worship was, that the God who was worshipped was of limited power—that His authority reached only to one part of nature, and that the universe of matter was divided amongst the gods as the kingdoms of the world were divided amongst the reigning monarchs of different lands.

In modern times, and in our own day, the assertion has been made that the God of the Old Testament, the Jehovah of the Israelites, was worshipped as a national god—that the people looked on Him as the local god of their country, just as much as David was accounted a national king; and we are told that the notions of the Israelites on this subject were of the narrowest kind. Now it is true that in Israel there were many whose thoughts of God were narrow and unworthy enough; true that from age to age

thousands were falling into the idolatry of the surrounding nations; and perhaps it is true that many considered Jehovah as the national god of their country in the narrowest sense: but there existed in the minds of thinking and truly religious men far higher conceptions of God, and we should err greatly if we estimated the religious belief of Israel either by the Syrian notion of God, or by modern assertions with respect to the ideas which prevailed in ancient times.

The words of King Solomon at the dedication of the Temple are in perfect accordance with the language and conceptions of men who were the religious guides and leaders of the people. "Behold, the heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have builded!" Solomon well knew that, notwithstanding the local services of the tabernacle and the temple, which identified the sacred places with the residence of God, God's great presence was all around, was everywhere—could not be limited to the visible universe, much less to that small corner of that universe to which the life and works of man pertained.

There is a difficulty in attempting to realise to ourselves the special presence of God in any one place more than in another, at any one time more than at another. Such expressions, indeed, can

only be used in reference to our own thoughts and feelings, though they have come to be used as if they had respect to God Himself. When we speak of the rising of the sun, and of his place amongst the stars, we use language which seems true, because it is true to us. It is we who move from one spot to another, it is our earth which revolves, and it is we who pass from one side of the sun to the opposite; but we speak as if it were the heavens which moved around us. In like manner we use language to express our religious thoughts which seems true, but which is only true in appearance. We speak of coming into God's presence, of God dwelling in temples, of God manifesting His presence, of God coming near to us. But if we try to explain such language, we are compelled to resort to an explanation similar to that just referred to. The change is in us—in our thoughts and feelings, in our desires, in our conceptions of divine truth. God is always near us: there can in reality be no spot or moment of which we can say, more truly than of any other, here is the presence of God. There may be times when our minds are fuller of the thought of God—times when we realise to ourselves His presence more than at others; and at such times we say, God is nearer to us than He was. But this is true only in appearance. The

change is in our consciousness. Our eyes are opened for a time, and we consider the fact of God's presence; but when our eyes are closed, and when our minds no longer dwell on the fact, it is still there. God's presence is not less real when we are blind to it than when our minds are oppressed or gladdened with the thought of it. But though it is not in reality nearer, it is *to us* nearer at one time than at another. Our minds are narrow and limited: it is but one thing that we can receive or dwell upon at a time; and when we turn our thoughts to some particular object, it looks to us for the moment as if there were only one object in the universe. God is not far from each one of us; but there are hours and days when this truth is virtually for us no truth at all, and there are other times when we are amazed that it should ever have been out of our thoughts.

Solomon refers to other temples than that one which he was dedicating to the service of God.

There is the vast temple of the universe—"heaven, even the heaven of heavens." These words represent to us something very different from what they represented in Solomon's day and in his mind. The whole creation was to the people of his time one thing; to us it is another. To men in old times the sky was indeed vast, and the stars countless and beyond reach; but to the thought of our own

time the material universe has been immeasurably extended. The eye has been aided by the telescope to see farther into space, and by the microscope to see worlds at our hand which in those early days were not suspected to exist. To us the words "upwards" and "downwards" are expressions for the one great boundless expanse in which are worlds without number. But in one respect there is no change. Infinite as are our conceptions of space, we can use Solomon's words in their literal sense, and say, "The heaven, even the heaven of heavens, cannot contain Thee." We never let our thoughts of matter gain the victory. We never conceive of God dwelling within the regions of space after the manner of a man dwelling in his home. Words which express correct thoughts of ourselves and of one another have simply no meaning when applied to God.

The presence of God was associated with the sanctuary in the tabernacle and in the temple. The tabernacle of the Israelites was simply a tent, divided into two parts by a thick curtain or veil; and in the second of these, which was entered through the first, there was laid the ancient ark or sacred chest containing the tables of the Covenant: and into this Holiest of all, as the chamber was called, no one ever entered except the high priest once a-year. A similar arrangement was made when, instead of the

simple tent, the gorgeous temple of Solomon arose, adorned by all the art of his time. The whole building was held in admiration; but the spot which beyond all others was associated with the name of God, was that single apartment where the ark was placed. It was perhaps a natural error to suppose that there, more than anywhere else, the presence of God really was; nay, that some spot should be associated with the immediate worship offered to God, was perhaps essential to the training of the human race in the spirit of true religion. A time was to come when neither in Jerusalem nor Samaria should there be a higher claim to the presence of God: but that time was yet future. Even now, when we are taught to believe that God is a Spirit, and when the words of Jesus Christ are never out of our minds, "They that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth," we feel how helpful it is to us to be able to associate holy thoughts and feelings, with certain places where our hearts have been stirred, and where better purposes of living have been formed. Even under the spiritual religion of Christianity, it is found necessary to associate holy and devout thoughts with outward rites and with becoming services, so that our purest conceptions of God and of His presence may not be lowered by what is unworthy.

The presence of God strikes us as a real and true power, when we see in the life of any man a spirit of goodness and love, which reminds us of God.

There are two forces in the world which compel our reverence and submission: there is the force of natural law, and the force of spiritual or moral purity. Each is in its place irresistible. We cannot defy the order or law of God's outward universe. As little can we refuse to acknowledge the power of truth and goodness as they are seen in a human life. Nay, I think that it is just in our best and highest moments that we are disposed to attach far greater importance to the inward and spiritual, than to the outward and material. There is far more to convince you of the presence of God in the purity and gentleness of a living soul than in the thunder or storm, or even the whole physical heavens.

But let us leave out of sight all other men who have lived on the earth, and let us confine ourselves in our consideration of the presence of God to the life of Him whose history is recorded for us by the four evangelists. If we accept the story of Jesus of Nazareth, and receive that teaching which He gives of Himself and His mission to the world; and if we add to this the teaching which comes to us from those sources of experience and truth which have been the guide of the Christian Church for eighteen

hundred years,—we shall understand the nature of that temple which was not made of stone, the temple of Christ's body, which formed the centre of reverence and affection to the disciples, and which has ever since been the best evidence to the world of the indwelling of God in a visible life on earth. That life was a most sacred one. It was in itself a testimony to the truth; it was, to all who had eyes to see it, a proof of God's nearness and presence. There could be no better evidence of the existence of a supreme power of goodness and love than the life of Jesus Christ. Long after, when the disciple John looked back on what he had heard and seen, he said, "The life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us."

The nature of the divine indwelling in Christ is not a question which we can either comprehend or explain. But the fact itself is not determined by our understanding of it. It might be quite intelligible without being true, and it may be quite true without being intelligible. I refer to it at present, inasmuch as it casts some light on the nature and character of God, and reveals Him to us in a manner fitted to confirm our faith and hope in Him. No man has ever been able to speak of the nature of God with the same assurance and distinctness as in

speaking of the nature of men ; but there are aspects of the divine character which we can discern, and the contemplation of which brings hope and strength to our hearts ; and one of these is the relationship of God as a Father. But when did this relationship begin, and when did this aspect of the divine nature first appear ? Was it when man came into being ? Did the first feeling of love issue from the heart of our heavenly Father when He created man or formed a human spirit ? Was there, during untold ages, a Divine Being, with no object to commune with, and no possibility of communion or fellowship ? and is the element of affection and sympathy a thing which did not spring up till long after there was wisdom and power ? Or does it not convey to us an assurance of greater comfort and strength, to consider that the affections are of the very essence of the divine nature, and that the capacity of loving and being loved are as deep and eternal as any part of that nature ? If there never was a point in all the past when God was not loving and beloved ; if it belongs to His being, so far as we dare to think of it, to exercise sympathies and affections, and if these sympathies and affections were not something called into existence only in relation to us, but were always there, and always active, does not this cast a light on His Fatherly nature, of such a kind as to increase our confidence

in it, and make us feel that His love is eternal, and cannot be alienated by our feebleness or unworthiness?

I do not say that such thoughts—or, as you may call them, speculations—can convince any one, or persuade him to believe in God and in His love, but they seem to me to be not without fruit and life. And if one can lay hold of the truth of the indwelling of God in His Son, as a fact which extends far back beyond what words can describe or the imagination grasp, it appears to me that one thereby obtains a firmer hold of the assurance that God has had always in His heart the tenderness and love of a Father, and that this divine affection and power of loving and communicating love did not take its rise at the creation of man, nor would it cease to exist if man ceased to be.

The consciousness of the presence of God is a matter of which one ought to speak with profound caution and reserve. I have seen statements on this matter which appeared to me to venture far beyond the limits of freedom and reverence. The presence of God is not to be tested by one special mark or sign. Whatsoever is in accordance with the Spirit of God—be it devoutness, or earnestness, or spiritual intelligence, or charity—is to that extent an evidence of the presence of Him

who is the origin and cause of all goodness. Christ on one occasion said to His disciples, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Agreement in spirit amongst His disciples is a proof of His presence: it is the way in which His presence is felt and seen, and there can be no better or higher way. The person of Jesus Christ was sacred, but He said, "It is expedient for you that I go away." The spirit of Christ, the spirit of peace, of truth, of charity that was in Him—that spirit, when it dwells in the hearts of men who meet together in His name, is the presence of Jesus Christ. Unity of heart in what is good and honourable is an evidence of Christ's presence. Jesus, as I understand it, does not mean merely to say, Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there will I come. He has already come: they could not be together in His name unless they had met in His spirit; and such a meeting is unity and peace.

In our loftiest thoughts of what is sacred, let us feel that the presence of God is something higher and wider still. Let us see in the temple of the universe, in the temples made by human hands, in the temple of the Christian Church, proofs of the nearness and sacredness of God. But rising above all we see and know of what is sacred, let there be a

reverence for that God whom we cannot find out unto perfection. So shall we learn, day by day, to see God everywhere, and especially in the life of Jesus Christ to behold an image of Him nowhere else to be witnessed. And not for purposes of reverence only ought we thus to seek after God, but in order that we may be filled with the same mind, and grow ourselves day by day into His divine likeness.

Christ's Shrinking from Suffering.

"Now is my soul troubled ; and what shall I say ? Father, save me from this hour : but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again."—JOHN xii. 27, 28.

THERE are often turning-points in human life which determine the future and give a tone to all after-years. There are single events in the history of every individual which, though they happen within the compass of a day, or even of a very small portion of a day, give you a greater insight into a man's life than whole weeks or months might do when filled with only commonplace occurrences. In every man's character there are germs of good and evil which lie hid and almost dead until circumstances favourable to their growth afford them an opportunity of rising and ripening. Most of us have probably felt in regard to some of the friends we have known in life, that, however well we knew them and loved them for years, we never knew how much there was in them worthy of being known and loved until some

crisis arose, some occasion for testing their faithfulness, some trouble or calamity, some emergency or difficulty in our lot, which helped us to see further into their inmost being, and to understand what large and unsuspected treasures existed of kindness and goodness in their hearts. These times of trial do not exhibit the man differently from what he is in reality, but they exhibit him differently often from what he has seemed to be. They have all the force of a judgment, when the secret character and life are cast, as it were, into a crucible, when only that which is solid survives, and everything which is dross perishes.

These events, these trials, often form a turning-point in life, and give a tone and colour to all that follows. They may be short in duration, but they contain the history of years within them. They have all the effect of a great battle which decides for ages the course of national history; from henceforth the world is, as it were, a different sphere of labour—from henceforth old things pass away and all things become new.

In the narrative of the life of Jesus Christ we find such a crisis recorded. A conflict has occurred, on the issue of which the fate of many ages—yea, of all time and of all coming generations—appears to be suspended. Such a crisis indeed came to Him not once, but oftener; but each successive time it was

fraught with consequences which we cannot calculate. The accounts which we have of these occurrences are very brief, and they leave much unrecorded. Their brevity, moreover, has left great room for the imagination to work; and the blanks have been filled up according to the tastes, the prejudices, the convictions, and beliefs of men. Indeed, if you consider the extraordinary variety and contradictoriness of human thoughts concerning divine things, founded, as men suppose, on Holy Scripture, you will find how many are built, not upon the simple and plain facts of revelation, but upon the interpretation given to things which are left, and perhaps designedly left, undetermined and undefined. People often get in Scripture what they bring to it. In incidents like this which I have read, therefore, one is safe to accept what is written with reverence; and it is best to leave what is unwritten and unrecorded to be dealt with in the spirit of caution, lest we be rushing unbidden upon ground where we have no light, and where we may stumble and fall.

First, then, let us see what was the occasion of the words of the text. To understand them we must go back to verse 20: "There were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast." The anxiety of these Gentiles outside of the Jewish community to see Christ draws from Him the words, "The

hour is come, that the Son of Man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." The event was, in point of fact, symbolical of the future. The time had come when the kingdom of God was about to burst the narrow boundaries of one nation, when there was to be neither Greek nor Jew, and when men of other races were to be admitted to privileges and blessings which were to be universal. Christ was to break down the wall of partition, and bring all men into one. But much lay before Him ere this could happen. Not by living only, but by suffering and dying, was He to accomplish this great end. And so His discourse begins with the comparison of Himself and His work to a seed of corn which must first die before the new blade springs up and the new harvest swells and multiplies. And He concludes with expressing the same truth in words equally striking: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me"—words which the evangelist explains when he says, "This He said, signifying what death He should die."

"The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified"—the hour, *i.e.*, when men from other

lands and of other races come to see Him. It is but few who come, yet these few are like the first ripe ears of corn in a field, telling of a great harvest which is soon to ripen. But before the time comes when that glory shall be full, He himself, the root and life of the new kingdom of God, must pass through an appointed path of sorrow and pain and darkness. The fruits of all His labour are not to be enjoyed until sin has wrought its bitter work upon Him; and the time for its full rage and fury is hastening on. He had often foretold its coming: He sees its approach, and the black shadow of it already crosses His way; it chills His heart, it destroys the calm and peace of life. "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say?" For a moment He seems in doubt whether to proceed or pause. The words, "Father, save me from this hour," have appeared to some to be a prayer to be delivered from His sufferings; by others they are regarded as part of the question beginning with the other words, "What shall I say?" as if He continued the question by asking, "Shall I say, 'Father, save me from this hour'?" But the thought of drawing back from suffering is instantly dismissed when He remembers that His task and His purpose from the beginning had contemplated this end. "For this cause came I unto this hour." Such an expression of distress, such a conflict of mind and

feeling, must have had no common source. "My soul is exceeding sorrowful," He said at another time, "even unto death." And in the garden of Gethsemane, where His agony, to which this was only a prelude, reached its height, He prayed three times the very prayer, which is referred to here only once, when He said, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." It must have been no common pain or fear which made Him cry, "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say?" What the exact nature of it was, we are not told; and the desire to know has led to various conjectures, which have been adopted, not because of anything recorded in the history of Christ, but because of what it is supposed to mean.

1. It has been supposed by some that the feeling expressed by Christ's words was simply the fear of death. But we must reject this interpretation as shallow and unsatisfactory. Granting that Jesus was made in all respects like unto His brethren, and was subject to their human sorrows and troubles, the expressions, excessive and oft-repeated, of His trouble of heart at the prospect of what was before Him, are not to be understood by saying that He, in common with other men, shrank from the doom which has embraced all mankind. He shrank from it doubtless, and feared it too, as a dread and strange

thing; and if it were recorded as a slight or a passing word of anxiety or pain, we might have accepted it as a proof that Jesus was not exempt from that solemn awe which gathers over every human spirit in the contemplation of death. But the agony of mind which He endures is an agony which thousands and thousands both before and since have counted unworthy of a soul which believes in a better life. The agony which He endured far exceeded the trouble or anxiety of His own disciples when their time came to meet death; and other martyrs since, not in tens and hundreds, but in numbers far greater, have met the sword and the stake, and the poisoned cup and the wild beast, with a fortitude which we should miss in this grandest of all lives, if nothing more is to be found in this mental suffering of Christ than a natural shrinking from death and a dread of encountering it. It is but a superficial explanation of Christ's passion which rests upon such a supposition.

2. But if we reject this explanation, are we bound to accept the notions which have been offered to us by others who have gone to the opposite extreme, and whilst recognising in the event a mystery which is doubtless very deep, have deprived it of all possible connection with our common nature? Because we set aside a theory which is too slender and superficial,

does it follow that we are bound to frame another theory, equally untenable and for different reasons? I think we are not; and I regard it as rash and unprofitable to fill up the gap in a narrative like this with our own poor thoughts and speculations.

We know that such sufferings were not the fruit of His personal wrong-doing; we know that He had no bitter remorse; we know that He whose whole life was one of unselfish dedication to the service of God and to the good of the world,—who had not a thought which He needed to hide, and who never entered on a single enterprise for His own personal gratification,—could not endure inexpressible fear and pain and sorrow unless in connection with the fears and pains and sorrows of others. But in what way this could be, who can tell? It is one thing to know the fact and to believe it, and it is another thing to presume to explain the details of a scene on which we gaze with fear and amazement. Better far would it be for us, as we draw near to see this great sight, to tread gently as if we were on holy ground; better far to be in our own estimation less wise than to seek to be wise above what is written; better to know that the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many, and that He once suffered for sins, the just for the

unjust—better to know this, even if we cannot define the precise method in which this strange history has operated upon the world. Enough for those who are content to wait for a higher light on this divine work, to accept it as in itself the highest proof of Christ's love, of God's love to mankind.

This event reveals to us the great secret moving power of Christ's own personal life; and remembering that our human life is so closely associated with His, this expression of Christ, "Father, glorify Thy name," reveals to us what is the true rest of the soul, and shows us what the soul falls back on in its seasons of greatest perplexity and trouble.

It teaches us what is the true rest of the soul. "Father, glorify Thy name"—this was the rest of Christ's soul. My soul is troubled, were His words—"My soul is troubled;" and "what shall I say?" There were two things He could say,—two things widely different in some lips, but not really different in His. There were two ways in which He might seek an outlet for His troubled soul—two ways in which He might obtain relief. The first was, "Father, save me from this hour." Christ might be rescued from all that He dreaded; that would have been one way of deliverance from suffering and death. He might have escaped the coming sorrows which were crowding in upon Him; the shame of being tried as

a malefactor and blasphemer; the injustice, the blows, the mockery, the scourging, the crucifixion. He might have been spared the solitude and the awful inward anguish of Gethsemane; and He might have been saved from His death on Calvary. For a moment He looks in that direction, as if some deliverance from His trouble of soul lay there. He contemplated such a possibility only for a moment, and then He dismisses it as an impossibility—a thing not to be desired, a thing rather to be put at once and for ever away. He gives utterance to the words only to recall them; in the very instant that He utters them He cancels them: “Father, save me from this hour,” and immediately He adds, “But for this cause came I unto this hour.” The rest of the spirit is not to be got in escape from the evils of life and from its trials. There is much happiness in such escapes, and it is lawful to pray for them; but they may be given or not, and yet the soul does not miss or lose its true rest in God.

In what, then, does the rest of the soul lie? “Father, glorify Thy name.” This is Christ’s resting-place for His soul. This is the rock where He finds refuge. His trouble is soothed by this thought and prayer. It is enough for Him if this is done, if God’s name is glorified. If God’s character and purpose on the earth and in the universe is vindicated,

and if His divine will is done, then all must be well done; and any amount of suffering, or disappointment, or fear, which are met in life, are to be accounted as not borne in vain. Jesus Christ will rest on the eternal truth and faithfulness of God; that is the foundation of His confidence. "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered." This was the ground of all His peace and rest. "Father, not my will, but Thine be done." "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." Only let God's name be glorified, and nothing remains to be wished for; everything else will come right. Seek first *that*, for *that* is the kingdom of God, and nothing shall be awanting. Then you can say, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul."

This is perhaps too high a doctrine to preach to many. I am sure it is too high for most of us. And I do not suppose it possible for us, when all is going well, to look such an alternative in the face, and to choose it deliberately. But when the time for choice is come and gone, and when some event in life has brought the doctrine from the region of the possible to the actual, the human heart has often been taught to acquiesce in it, and to find its true rest in God's will.

We, too, have our times of trial as well as Christ.

Does it seem presumptuous to place our small troubles side by side with His? Does it seem as if we were treading on holy ground with daring feet when we venture near to our Lord in that time of His inward distraction of mind, and compare, even at a distance, our own case with His? If it does seem presumptuous, that must arise from a want of right attention to Christ's own words, and from putting our own meaning on words and acts which Christ has interpreted for us. "If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be" (verse 26). And in these our times of trial, which are like His, but far, far beneath them, we fall back on the life and words of Jesus Christ; and from that hour of His life when His soul was troubled, and when He found rest in His Father—from that hour we draw strength, and we date from that point the beginning of victory over sin and fear.

As He was, so are we in the world; and we shall learn by the same experience which is recorded here, by the same experience which is recorded of St Paul elsewhere, when he prayed three times that the thorn in the flesh might be removed—we shall learn that the peace and rest of the soul lie not in the fulfilment of our individual choice, but in the eternal will and righteousness of God, who says, "My grace is sufficient for thee; My strength is made perfect in weakness."

The Purified Temple.

“And He went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought; saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves.”—LUKE xix. 45, 46.

THE three evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, record this event at the close of Christ's life. St John gives the account of it at the beginning of Christ's ministry, and at the first Passover feast which he attended. I do not enter into the question of chronology, or indeed into the question whether the event happened once only, or twice—both at the commencement and close of His ministry. It is not at all improbable, though it is not what we might have expected, that Jesus twice exercised this authority, and cleansed the Temple from practices which must seriously have hindered the prayers and devout thoughts of those who went up to the Temple to worship.

It is easy to account for the growth of the system which Christ put an end to. The practice of buying

and selling in the Temple grounds, and even within the sacred building, arose from the fact that at the great festivals crowds of people from all parts of the country flocked to Jerusalem to keep the feasts. The feast of the Passover was only held at Jerusalem; only there were the Passover lambs killed and eaten—only there indeed could any sacrifices be offered in religious worship at all. When thousands of families from all districts, therefore, assembled in the city, it was for their convenience that they should find on the spot the animals which were to be sacrificed and eaten. In the book of Deuteronomy reference is made to this custom, and provision is made for the observance of it. “If the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from thee, which the Lord thy God shall choose to set His name there, when the Lord thy God hath blessed thee: then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the Lord thy God shall choose: and thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul ’lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the Lord thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thy household” (Deut. xiv. 24-26).

It was natural enough that there should grow up

a system in Jerusalem corresponding to the great markets or fairs, by which all commodities likely to be required at the festivals could be procured by those who attended on these great and sacred occasions. Very soon buyer and seller might find it mutually advantageous to hold these markets as near as possible to the Temple, where the sacrifices were to be made, until finally they were allowed to encroach on the ground within the sacred enclosure itself. And this had become the practice when Christ visited the Temple. It was a system which must have jarred on the mind of every man who wished to observe the laws with reverence; and it must have still more offended those persons who went up to the Temple, not to offer sacrifice, but to offer prayer, and to yield to God their silent homage.

This act of Christ was one of authority. It was one of those acts which He wrought, right in themselves, but unsanctioned by earthly authority, and in the exercise of a power which he claimed to have not from man, but from his Father. The words which He used are to be found partly in the writings of Isaiah, where the Temple is called God's house of prayer (Isaiah lvi. 7), and partly in those of another prophet, Jeremiah, who says, "Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?" (Jer. vii. 11).

The act was also symbolical. The driving out of those that bought and sold would not purify the house of God, but it was symbolical of that purity which God demands. Jesus Christ Himself taught that all places were temples. "Neither at Jerusalem," he said, "nor in Samaria;" but "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." And it is well to have such teaching from Christ, otherwise, by an exaggerated and extreme interpretation of His words, we might have imagined that all outward worship was to be disregarded.

To what real or possible circumstances in our modern Church life may we compare the incident recorded here of Christ's casting out the traffickers in the Temple? or is there anything which can, properly speaking, be set side by side with it?

I shall not dwell on the regard which is to be paid to sacred places and their use, although it might justly be shown that outward reverence in places set apart for religious worship is a natural outcome of inward reverence, and is by no means to be esteemed as superstitious or unnecessary. But I may observe that we may look on the temple of God on earth in other lights, and learn from Christ's teaching other lessons.

Regarding the Church as an institution, with its

possessions, its laws, its days of worship, its rulers, its teachers, its outward services, we may find for ourselves a lesson in this incident. And that lesson is, that the spiritual character of the Church is everything, and that its first object is to deepen in men's hearts the sense of the divine and the spiritual. When that great end is lost sight of, the Church has parted with her strongest claims upon the world, and it has forfeited also its privilege as a witness for God on the earth. The spiritual influence is the first and chief purpose of the Church of Christ. The lesson of this narrative comes home to us in these days, when so much time and thought are given to the outer framework of Church forms and usages; and that lesson may be needed to correct our spirit of bustling and restless energy in what is at the best only the machinery of spiritual life, and not spiritual life itself. There is no class of men who are more in danger of losing the true meaning of religion than those who are employed in its service. If I were to seek for cases in which spiritual truth had been travestied and turned to not only secular but profane purposes, I do not know that I could find them more readily than in men to whom all sacred words and acts have grown so familiar that they have ceased to express spiritual facts at all. Those who are always engaged in religious works are apt to lose the sense

of their sacredness. It is said that there are departments of duty in law courts where both judges and pleaders are so much taken up with the petty details of business, that they lose all ideas of the great principles of equity; and certain it is, that even in the administration of religious work there are spheres in which it is very hard for men to keep a firm hold of the great ends of a Christian institution like the Church. If it was a temptation, under the old code, for priest and Levite to forget, in the ordinary preparations for the altar, the deeper spiritual meaning of the sacrifice, quite as much does this temptation lie in the way of those who nowadays take charge of the affairs of the Christian Church. It is not in matters which are unconnected with the Temple worship that these abuses are found. The traffic which had encroached on the Temple grounds was in itself a traffic which had grown up from the very force of necessity. Provision had been made for it, and it was all right enough outside the Temple, and as a preparation for its service; nay, at its first introduction into the precincts of the sacred house, there might be something said in the way of justifying it, as a convenient arrangement for crowds of worshippers. And so in all our varied machinery for religious work there is need of method, of order and arrangement, otherwise all things would fall into confusion. There

is a place for all that detail of regulation which engages the attention of the Church, just as there was a place for the arrangements required for the Temple service. But the danger is, that the subordinate should push its way too far, and thrust itself into the very holiest spot, and that the spiritual purpose for which all such arrangements are designed should sink out of sight.

And this danger besets all men, especially those who are called to much active labour touching the external business of the Christian Church. No man more needs to be on his guard against an unspiritual life than the man who is perpetually employed in spiritual offices. He is in constant risk of falling into mere routine. There are so many things in connection with his duty which are really as secular as any employment in the world, that he is very apt to carry the secular feeling into the holiest work, and to lose sight of the spiritual aims he ought always to have in view. It might be thought that the clergy, and other ecclesiastical persons whose care it is to administer religious rites, should be free from all the little sources of irritation which fret the tempers of men in the everyday business of society; but a moment's consideration may show how it is otherwise. It might naturally be believed that where the grand object of a man's existence was to guide the

devotions and consciences of his neighbours, that one object would thrust out every other, or at least overshadow it. But sad to say, the experience of all who have tried it is, that even living in the spiritual temple, and being day by day occupied with its affairs, does not exempt a man's mind from the most worldly frettings and anxieties. He brings within the courts of God's house what ought to be left without; he forgets his high spiritual functions in the bustle and care which attend them; and it is really no absolute guarantee of a religious and spiritual life that a man's profession is the teaching of religion. There is a life within a life needed, and men who have much to do with the progress of religion are the men who are in danger of losing their high sense of what is religious and devout in the common routine of worldly duties which creep into their profession.

Christ's words and acts read us all a lesson, then: they tell us that in the most sacred occupations of life there may be found cares and anxieties which are less religious, and which are apt to swallow up too much of a man's time and thoughts.

There is another temple of a different kind, of which a word may be said. The whole Christian body is, in the words of the New Testament, a temple of God. There is a sacredness in that temple, the spiritual community of Christians, if we

would only think of it, much greater than in the Temple of Jerusalem, or in any building devoted to holy uses. And just as the whole Christian community is a temple sacred to God, so each individual heart is in itself a temple where God Most High is honoured and worshipped. Of that temple, then, as understood in both these senses—the general Church of God, and the individual Christian—let me say a word in applying the circumstances of this narrative.

How many things have been carried into the temple of God, and forced upon the conscience and attention of the Church of God, which are really hurtful to its supreme interests, and which are as truly non-essential to the spiritual wellbeing of the Church of Christ as the traffic in the Temple was to its spiritual purpose! Burdens in all ages have been laid upon the human conscience which the conscience could not bear. Thousands of human beings have lived and died under the constraint and bondage of precept and doctrine which God never imposed. Three hundred years ago, the preachers of that day, in expounding this incident of Christ expelling the traffickers from the Temple, used to compare it with the purification of the Christian Church when it was delivered from many vain ceremonies; and the comparison was in many respects justifiable. It may be

equally true, however, that the Temple has always needed a visit of her great Purifier; and whether we ourselves see it or not, those who come after us may see wherein we were wrong, and were laying more upon the conscience of the Church of God than was necessary. It is a serious thing to make sad those whom God has not made sad, to trouble men's minds with what ought not to give them trouble, and to teach for doctrines the commandments of men. Each new period in the history of the Church, when some scourge has been applied, and the Temple courts have been cleared of traditions and ceremonies and falsehoods which had defiled the house of God, has been a repetition of Christ's work on the day when He said, "My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves."

And it never can be out of place to recall to the minds of all men that each individual heart is a temple in which there ought to be purity and sincerity. In the most solemn moments of a man's life, thoughts and desires rush in which mar the worship, and hinder the good that might be wrought. The cares and riches and pleasures of life choke the good seed; and when one ought to choose the good part and to drink in eagerly the truth, the spirit is careful and troubled about many things. Worse thoughts still, and baser thoughts, sometimes take possession of

the mind when it seems to be occupied with worship and with the unseen world. These thoughts are not scared away by the holiest place; they come and stay, and when words of devotion are on the lips, wrong and sinful thoughts are darkening the soul within. Who shall scourge these away? Lord, "cleanse Thou me from secret faults;" Lord, teach us the power of self-restraint, and govern our hearts, that our meditation may be acceptable in Thy sight.

But it may be said, Is not such teaching opposed to the teaching we often hear in this place, that all life is religion, and that religion ought to be carried into everything?

I am not careful to guard myself too much against being misunderstood, because nobody preaches more constantly than I do myself the religion of everyday life; nobody insists more strongly than I do on the necessity of making conscience of everything, and of doing the commonest work as if it were God's work. Indeed I feel that the difference between the secular and the sacred is apt to be overlooked, and I may unconsciously lead some who listen to me from week to week to think that the most earthly work is as religious as the most spiritual. Let any such tendency in you or me, then, be met by considering that there is a life within the life, a shrine within the temple, a spirit within the body of religious work;

and that whilst all places may be made holy, and all days religious, and all tasks divine, there are times and engagements in which the spirit of a man needs to be specially purified by coming into contact with the eternal, and the unseen, and the spiritual. It is with the life of religion in the soul as it is with the spirit of friendship; there must be special and set times for its cultivation and enjoyment. If a man never sees child or brother or friend except in a crowd, the affection and confidence which belong to the relationship will hardly thrive and grow; they will be wanting in depth. If a man can never whisper into the ear of his truest friend anything except what is shouted from the house-top to the world, his sympathies will be shallow. The bonds which bind a man to his friend must be strengthened by quiet fellowship, or they will cease to be firm. The spirit of a man craves to be shut in from the mass of unknown faces, in order that it may be free to utter all its thoughts. Every stranger must go out of Joseph's presence when he makes himself known to his brethren.

And so it is with the soul and God. There must be thought, meditation, intercourse, and communion between the human and the divine, in order that the inner life may be refreshed and sustained. The spiritual life has a centre, like the

bodily, and it must circulate. There must be blood in every vein to the smallest, and it must visit every portion of the body ; but it must have a great centre of action, the heart, from which it is circulated, and to which it must return. There must be spiritual life everywhere, but there is needed a great central heart of life from which the channels are filled. There must be religion everywhere, but the soul needs a fountainhead from which to draw it. All knowledge, all labour, all places, ought, it is true, to be religious, but there is needed a source of religious feeling and power for them all. Religion everywhere must have its special aims. Every library needs its Bible, every week its Sunday, every land its Church, every day of toil its moments of seclusion and spiritual thought, otherwise religion grows shallow. There may be men who can pass through life feeling no need of those religious times and those religious aids to the spirit which are the heritage of the Christian Church ; but, for the great mass of mankind, I see not how the passage between the soul and its God, between earth and heaven, is to be kept open if there is no special provision made for worship and devotion. The streams will run dry if no rain falls on the earth ; the best teacher will soon exhaust his own resources if he does not maintain contact with minds of equal or greater vigour than his own ;

the most devout and the most charitable mind will lose the essence of devotion and charity if it does not hold fellowship with the grand Source of all goodness and love.

Such times are of use to us, and they help to recall to us the great end of our human life. We are day by day so engrossed with one thing and another, that we all require to go aside from our books and our toils and our everyday tasks, in order that we may realise the vast interests by which we are surrounded, and which have been driven out of our minds. It is here just as, I am sure, it has happened with most of us. We have left some room where, during the evening, our minds were engrossed with discussion and controversy, or with some all-important matter, as we believed, which produced in brain and body feverishness and excitement; and when we came out into the open air, the stars were shining down on us calmly, and by their silent testimony were reminding us that there was a great universe of God above us, to whose depths these our mortal troubles did not reach, and where God's will was being wrought as truly as on earth. And the contrast has helped to soothe our minds, and to bring rest. So, and I trust in a far higher degree, shall it be with us in our spiritual worship to-day and always. We shall remember that there is around

us and above us another world where truth is everything and God is all in all, and from which, if we took our stand in it, we should be able to look down on all things here, wondering why the earthly absorbed us, and why the heavenly and the spiritual were so much forgotten.

May God teach us to live this spiritual life, and to go down to our house justified, strengthened, purified by our worship !

True and False Standards of Character.

“Let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.”—GALATIANS vi. 4.

EVERY reader will see that these words have a close bearing on both what goes before and on what follows after them. The subject on which the apostle has begun to speak in this section of his Epistle, is our duty to the erring who desire to return. That duty is forbearance, forgiveness, restoration, meekness—“considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”

With this duty he naturally contrasts another spirit — unsympathetic, selfish, overbearing, proud, seeing only one side of character in others, and like the Pharisee in the parable, turning the lantern first upon the defects of others, and then upon the excellences of self, in order that there may be a sharper line drawn between the two. Such a spirit of exclusiveness and separation is contrary to the spirit of the Gospel. The law of Christ, according to which

we bear one another's burdens, is a law which implies a spiritual union, and not a separation. The law of selfishness says, What matters it to me what my neighbour or brother is, whether he does right or wrong? it is for me simply to praise or blame him: but the law and spirit of Christ Jesus remind me that there are other bonds between mankind. When Christ bore the infirmities of others, it meant that He felt them bitterly, that He was vexed at heart, and that He desired to have them removed. To bear one another's infirmities is to enter into the feeling of relationship which exists between men, and to draw from it pleasure and pain. You can understand better the words of Paul when you consider your feelings towards some one in whom you are interested. When you see a friend commit an act of folly, or when you hear him utter something unworthy of his position, you feel the disgrace as keenly as if the act had been your own, or as if the foolish word had been spoken by your own lips. You in a manner identify yourself with your friend; and though in your heart you feel that you cannot defend him, you are conscious at the same time that you have no desire to broach the subject to others. You are glad when people are silent on it, when no notice is taken of it, and still gladder when you find that your friend has come to see the matter as you see it,

and shares in your sorrow and shame. Something like this is the meaning of the precept, "Bear ye one another's infirmities." The opposite spirit, as I have said, is one of exclusiveness and pride, and it leads to very false conclusions. Where there is no spirit of sympathy and meekness in regard to the faults of others, but, on the contrary, a spirit of indifference, as if their nature were not ours, or their temptations ours, there grows up a tendency to imagine that, somehow, a lustre is shed on our life and character by these very faults, and that, because we are free from them, we are entitled to be self-satisfied. Such is the apparent connection between these words and those which follow, "If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself."

And at this point He recalls men from a false standard of judging of themselves to a true one. "Let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden." Their character is not to be judged by comparison with others, but on the basis of its own worth.

The False Standard of Character.—There is a very common mode of judging of ourselves and our friends which is in itself utterly false and unsatisfactory; I mean that mode of estimating character and works,

not by what these are in themselves, but by what they are in comparison with the life of others. "I may not be what I ought to be," a man says; "but side by side with my neighbour, I have no cause to be ashamed." The picture seems fairer if it has a dark background; and we fall into the habit of measuring our own goodness by other men's want of goodness. It so happens that in this way we may claim for ourselves merit where there is really nothing meritorious; and we may imagine ourselves deserving of praise, simply because others deserve blame. A man who has not been guilty of any act of dishonesty is often conscious of a secret act of self-praise when he hears of the fraudulent conduct of his neighbour: because one man loses character, the man who retains his is apt to think he has done something virtuous and noble. There are men who pass through life without being guilty of intemperance, who never would have supposed themselves entitled to any honour for their sobriety, had it not been for the degrading habits of drunkenness into which others have fallen. And yet if, instead of measuring his own character by the misdeeds and vices of others, a man were to prove or test his own work on its own merits, he no more would think of boasting of his deeds than he thinks himself skilled because he can walk without stumbling.

In your attempts to correct some evil in your own circle, be it in church or any other community, you are continually met with the reply, "That may be true, but we are not so bad as some"—a reply which shows how the badness of other people has made a far deeper impression on men's minds than the necessity of rising to a higher standard.

Improvements are continually arrested by this false method of estimating character and work. There are persons who seem to think that they are not bound to aim at a nobler end, or to make further progress, until the rest of the world has reached their present point. Instead of making conscience the standard of duty, they practically make other men's want of conscience the standard. Instead of saying, what can we now do, what ought we now to do, to benefit the world, or to attain to greater perfection of character and work? they inquire what other men have not done. They have no sorrow or compunction for anything they have done or left undone, so long as they can point to others who are more to blame than themselves,—as if health were to be measured, not by the pulse and vigour of the patient, but by the feverishness and insensibility of another patient lying at his side!

The scholar thinks it hard he should be corrected when his schoolmates are inferior to him; a servant

takes it amiss to be checked for carelessness, seeing there are other servants who have robbed their master and wasted his property. And as we rise in the scale of society and advance in the years of life, we find that the same fallacy bears rule. Instead of looking at a question on its own merits, we diverge into a second question which has really no connection with it. We justify ourselves, not on the ground that we are innocent, but on the ground that there are others guiltier. We meet the admonition to perseverance with the reply that many of our contemporaries are yet far behind us; and at heart we imagine that there is no reason to quicken our pace until our competitors have overtaken us.

One notices with regret and shame that motives drawn from the rightness of a course, as it is in itself, have little weight with many men unless you can show them that others around them are yielding to these motives. To them it is nothing that no step is being taken to remedy some evil or to accomplish some good. They are not moved to diligence by any such lofty principle as trying to meet the evil and grapple with it. As long as they can retort that they are not more indifferent than others, they are satisfied. On the other hand, if they can only be assured that others, and especially their opponents in politics, in religion, in national

rivalry, are intent on some undertaking, at once they are stirred up to emulation. It would seem as if the great moving powers of human life drew more vitality and force from the lower nature of man than from the higher—as if envy, grudging, pride, self-love, could muster greater strength and apply it with greater success than the pure sense of right or the love of goodness.

The spirit of this part of Paul's letter is pure and just, and his words strike at the root of this evil: a man may think himself to be something when he is nothing; he deceives himself, and measures his character by a false standard. But let every man prove or test his own work, and then he will have cause to rejoice with respect to himself, and not as he stands with respect to others.

Let every man prove his own work; let him test it on its own merits and for its own sake; and let it be judged, not by the indolence and failures of others, but by its own character and worth. This is the only judgment which is perfectly fair and true. It is not reasonable either to praise a man's work simply because others who could do it have not done it, or to withhold from him the praise that is due simply because he is not the only man who has done what is right. There are cases certainly where the success or failure of many may indicate the ease or

difficulty of a work; but in the region of human conduct, and where we have to do with the conscience and the will, every man has his own place towards God; to his own Master he standeth or falleth.

This method of judgment, whereby every man must prove his own work, is in accordance with facts of the spiritual world; for "every man must bear his own burden." Every man bears his own burden; every man's conscience is to him the measure of his own guilt and the measure of his own worth; and every man's personal character is, in the sight of God and of all who weigh it, the standard and the test of his work. The character is the outcome of a man's life and labours. What the man is, is really the fruit of what he does, and of what he thinks and speaks day by day; and the world soon comes to judge a man's works by this the most accurate of all tests—his character. It is this which, in the long-run, shows what a man's life has been made up of. It is the character which, sooner or later, discovers whether his work is genuine or false, noble or mean, Christ-like or earthly.

Consciously or unconsciously every man is writing his own story day by day, and day by day he is forming that character which cannot hide, and by which all he has done and said is determined. Each

man's personal character and individuality are composed of his own acts, outward and inward. What he is does not depend on a mere comparison of his works with the works of another, but on the absolute work of his own mind and life; and he cannot help the result upon his character. His mind is taking its shape and colour from all he imagines, and from all he desires, and from all he really and secretly aims at; and a man cannot at the same time do a base or wrong or selfish action without leaving the image and superscription of it on his character. And that character comes out when he little thinks of it, and is sure to betray him. In process of time the mind takes a form and complexion as decided and expressive as the body; the character of a man grows upon him, and imprints its features on his mind and memory with a distinctness as vivid as the expression of his eye and face. Every one sees how the acts and habits of a life of sin are stamped upon the countenance. Every day you see the proofs of an evil life in the outward features of those who are living in sin. You can read in the bold and shameless brow and eye a most accurate record of guilt. You can detect in the face and voice, in the look and glance of the eye, not only what is passing within the soul at that moment, but what has been passing within it when there was no one to

watch voice or eye. Now just as each man's acts are thus registering themselves by a mysterious and invisible power upon the person, so in a mode quite as mysterious, but also quite as definite and enduring, are the works and secret principles on which he lives imparting a tone and character to his mind. The law in the one case is as unerring as in the other. A man cannot by an act of will determine the ordinary expression of his face and eye; and above all, when he is off his guard, it tells its own story. I am speaking of course in general language, and of cases where nobody has any doubts. But if we could look on the mind within with as keen a perception, — and there are opportunities more or less presented by most men to look on their minds,—we might see that, without the man's own choice, his mind and character had taken a form which no efforts on his part can alter—no efforts, except such as need the clear space of a lifetime to perform, can reverse.

The character of every man is the measure of his works. The character will continue to tell what a man's life has been, and what in its inmost nature it continues to be. And in this matter each man bears his own burden—a burden in which others may sympathise, but which no human sympathy can relieve

him of. God has made visible in man His eternal law, that every man's own work is proved, so as to give him rejoicing or sorrow, as the case may be, in himself and not in another. That law is written in the character which every man carries with him, and which is in reality the recompense of his life and works.

And there is all the more need to test and prove our own work, that the time for doing our work is fast passing away. I do not mean merely that life is passing, and that the end of life is at hand. My brethren, there is a sense in which we die daily, in which we die often, and the work and duty of the day are as much beyond our power to amend or change as if we had passed from the present to the invisible world. When youth has passed into manhood, the hours and occupations, the tasks and pleasures of early years, are for ever gone. When a period has been assigned to us for accomplishing some enterprise, whether private or public, the close of that period which terminates our opportunities does in a sense terminate one portion of life. We have left its history behind us: the book has been taken out of our hands, and for all time it proclaims whether our work was done or left undone. We see much that might have been otherwise. Fain would

we blot out some of its pages, and write a new and a fairer record ; but the volume is finished, and the story is told : our work has passed into the countless sum of forces which have been let loose on the world to influence for good or evil the generation in which we live or those which shall come after. When the time set to us for our work comes to an end, there may remain many years of our life yet to run ; but in so far as the work which we undertook to do is concerned, our breath has passed away, we have yielded up our life, and our account has been given in. Our work has been marred or accomplished ; but henceforth it is there, to tell to all who choose to question it, whether it can stand the test of inquiry, or whether it has been unreal and untrue. Real and true it has been if we have done it in honesty, and with a single desire to serve our God, and to build up His cause of truth and righteousness on the earth ; but hollow and false, if we have suffered selfishness and party spirit and prejudice to give the tone to our actions.

I know well indeed that a time is coming when all the tasks and honours and pleasures of life shall be to us a thing of the past, and when our name and memory shall be for the world nothing but a vague tradition, and for our friends a thought only to be

cherished in unavailing sorrow. But I do not at present speak of that. I speak of a time not perhaps so remote. I speak of the present,—of the years during which we form part of the world's active life. Let us consider well the work which in that brief space is given us to do. Our great task is to be workers with God in His great purpose on earth; our high aim is by word and deed to sustain, and, if possible, raise the tone of social and national life in all that is good and praiseworthy. Our influence is gradually, and in modes unnoticed and unseen, pervading all around us; and that influence for good and evil is what we are responsible for. If by our conduct and our principles we are leavening the minds of others with the belief that personal ambition, or private ends, or any other unworthy aims are the springs of human action, we are hindering the course of God's kingdom, and we are removing the way-marks from those who would keep the right path. But if, on the other hand, we are endeavouring to realise our place and responsibilities, and are in our place striving to express the deep conviction of our hearts that truth is stronger than falsehood, that righteousness is mightier than temporary success, that honour and faithfulness are the glory and bulwark of human life, and that the welfare of

men and the cause of God can furnish motive enough to a career of energy and firmness, then are we serving God, and proving our work, and laying a foundation on which those who come after may build and raise still higher the structure of God's temple on the earth.

Patience needed by God's Workers.

“Let patience have her perfect work.”—JAMES i. 4.

IN the New Testament “patience,” in almost every case, has a reference to what has to be endured or suffered rather than to what has to be accomplished. Patience almost invariably suggests persecution, or trial, or temptation, and very seldom does it concern the spirit of slow persistent effort after what is right, in the way of active life. Nor is this to be wondered at. The first age of Christianity was an age of labour and toil, but it was more conspicuously an age of endurance. Christianity was regarded with suspicion and dislike; its apostles and preachers were looked on as enemies by the world at large; and the followers of Christ were exposed to many difficulties and trials of which we know nothing. The New Testament is full of words of encouragement and consolation; and the lesson of patience under sore afflictions naturally takes the shape of admonitions to calm and quiet

submission to what has fallen to man's lot. Various helps and encouragements to this virtue are given, and one of them is stated by the Apostle James—"The Lord is at hand." All these evils which you endure are soon to end. The time is short, and your sorrows and sufferings are not to endure for ever. No one can fail to appreciate the numerous forms in which the lesson of patience is taught as a virtue, where men are to show how possible it is to endure without losing hope. And the New Testament is a book to which the tempted and afflicted will come in every age, to find all that can be suggested to meet their case.

Since that age, Christianity has become a conquering religion as well as a suffering religion. It has forced its way into kingdoms and laws, into the framework of society, into the customs and habits of various countries on the globe; and its believers stand in need of something more than consolation under wrong. The spirit of patience takes a wider range now; and instead of meaning nothing more than patient endurance under suffering, it takes in all the difficulties and trials which come in the way of well-doing, and embraces all that might come under the word *perseverance*. This meaning of the word is indicated in the parable of the sower, where the good seed is likened to a man who brings forth fruit with

patience. And the Apostle James also adverts to this thought when he says: "The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain" (v. 7).

Let me notice some points in the nature of the Christian life which demand this spirit of patience or perseverance.

I. The kingdom of God shares, with all the works of God, the character of growth; and those who are fellow-workers with Him in this kingdom, must accept the laws and conditions of His kingdom, and must wait, and perhaps wait long. I need hardly dwell on this fact of the growth of the kingdom of God. You have only to consider what it means to see how natural and necessary it is that it should be characterised by growth, and perhaps very slow growth. The kingdom of God means all that is characteristic of that kingdom. The kingdom of God in the world and in the individual heart is the rise and ripening of all that is good, and great, and strong. The kingdom of God means not only the endurance of opposition, but the steadfast and earnest endeavour to overcome it. Take any single element of the character of a good man, or of a church, or of a nation, and you see how impossible it is that it

should all at once attain to perfection. Time, experience, are necessary. And perhaps the greater the virtue is, and the greater the work to be done, the slower will be the growth. It is so in the natural world, where the strongest tree, or the most sagacious and vigorous animal, comes to maturity after many years of slow growth. Civilisation is slow of growth; art, learning, high character in races and in individuals, all are of slow growth; but slower still is the development of religion, of high Christian virtue and character, whether in men or nations. It can hardly be otherwise. What has helped to root the tree in the earth? Was it not the storm which threatened it, as well as sun and rain and the slow gathering of nourishment from the soil? What, in like manner, has strengthened the Christian graces of good men, their wisdom, their faith, their charity, their spirit of watchfulness, their faithfulness? Was it not the daily struggle against evil, the daily need of resorting to God for help, the falling back upon great eternal truths in the heart? How otherwise could they have advanced from weakness to strength, from doubt to confidence, from inexperience in adapting means to ends, to ripe wisdom and stability of purpose? And all these graces and gifts require time and care; by no other means can they grow or become strong. If a man

had all he wanted at the outset, he might, after a long life, be worse off than when he began. Certainly he would be deficient in many good qualities, and his inner character would be less complete. In countries where the inhabitants can live without labour, civilisation makes no advance; they have all they need, and in vain do you ask them to put forth efforts to rise higher in knowledge or in skill. But not less is the training of the soul in what is divine and spiritual the fruit of opposition and hindrance. The hardest thing in the world is to do good, to chase away the prejudices and the errors and the bad habits which have taken root in the world. If a man could accomplish all this as by the magic wand, if he could, by a word or by a touch, dispel evil, and drive it away for ever; or if by a wish he could accomplish good, sow the seeds of righteousness, make provision for the instruction of the ignorant, the regeneration of society, — would he himself be as great and as good a man as if he had been obliged to reach his end by the long laborious process of thinking and revising his thoughts, restraining his spirit, looking in upon himself, and upward to the Source of all purity and wisdom? No; he would not himself receive so much benefit from his own work, his own character would not be so strong or so noble, nor would his influence on others be so

effective. The end gained would not be so thoroughly gained as when it is won by the ordinary methods of labour and patience. Christ prepared His followers for all this. By His parables, by His life, by His death, He taught His disciples that opposition, defeat, and apparent destruction were or might be parts of the history of His Church, and that the harvest might only be reaped after long ages of waiting.

The growth of the kingdom of God is by slow and often unnoticed degrees. And what is more, its development appears at times to be stopped, and people think it is going backward when it is really growing. There are times in the history of the Church when good men are alarmed at what they suppose to be the decay of true religion. They mistake the signs of decay, and they suppose that when certain forms of religion are departing, religion itself is passing away, until they learn by personal experience that the changes which they feared may bring fresh life and power.

This growth—so slow, so uncertain in outward appearance, so often advancing when it seems to have ceased, this growth of the kingdom of God in the individual—calls for a spirit of patience on the part of those who belong to the kingdom of God.

II. Patience in the work of God is necessary,

because it is no part of the condition of Christian service to see results. Results of some sort we ask to see, and results of some sort we do see ; but the full sum of our labours, the full effect of the labours of a whole Church, it may require more than one generation to see. Individual fruits may be visible, and in ordinary circumstances will be visible. You could hardly imagine a man expending thought and effort for years without in some degree influencing others. The man of enthusiasm will communicate his zeal to other minds. The man of high tone will exercise a power over the society in which he is placed. The man of clear judgment and pure feeling will doubtless, before his career is ended, enjoy the sight of many persons who have caught his spirit and character. But even that reward comes by patience. I do not speak of the individual only, I speak of the Church and of the world. Do we seriously intend, as a Christian Church, to exercise an influence over parts of the world where Christianity is unknown ? If we do, are we in earnest when we suppose that all we intend or hope to do can be done within the compass of a human life, or of a generation, or even of a century ? To take a single instance. Does any one imagine it a wild or useless enterprise to carry his civilisation and his faith to a people numbering a hundred or two hundred millions

of human beings? And does any one grow disheartened if, at the end of twenty, or thirty, or fifty, or even a hundred years, that task seems far from being accomplished? What reason had we to suppose that it would be accomplished within that limited space of time? We ourselves have enjoyed a Christian civilisation for centuries; we have enjoyed liberty of speech and thought for some generations; we have had it in our power as a people, so far as money and opportunity are concerned, to regenerate the minds of the nation, to educate them, to train them to habits of order, sobriety, intelligence, and what has been the result? Is not the end thus indicated far, very far from being reached? And how do we excuse our failure? It is no easy matter, we say, when we are challenged—it is no easy matter to alter the habits of a people, to change superstition into reasonableness, coarseness into refinement, impurity into holiness, brutish ignorance into knowledge. That is our answer when we are asked why we do not reform our own countrymen. But the very persons who make all these large admissions, and acknowledge that it is no easy thing to affect for good the characteristics of a whole community whose language we speak, and amongst whom the great majority are on the side of order and good conduct, will not make the same allowance for those who try to influence, by the Gospel

and its gentle ministries, the character of nations older than our own, with far older and deeper prejudices, with national habits and vices of a different sort. No; people say to the Christian Church, you have had fifty or eighty years' trial, and what have you made of it? Surely, the Church may reply, the experiment has been but a brief one; we have had a single life for your thousands, we have had to contend with foreign thoughts, foreign modes of speech, a worship, a race, a religion, all strange to us,—you ought, in fairness at least, to give us as many chances to convert, to bring about the Christianisation of a hundred millions by means of a few hundreds of persons, thinly scattered, as you have had to civilise and convert to honest and good living, say a population amounting to three or five millions. We may be wrong, or weak, or unfortunate in our methods and our results, but it is quite within our province to say to those who smile at our efforts—"You at least have no right to cast it in our teeth." You at least, we may add, are a practical illustration of how difficult it is to alter, in one or many generations, the habits of classes and nations.

Some, again, will say, the Christian Church is going on wrong lines altogether. What the Church ought to do is to set herself to prepare for the time when the great Head of the Church will return again and

claim and conquer His own. But without stopping to discuss a question of this sort, let me say that such an assertion is really no objection at all to Christian effort at home or in other lands. It may be true that finally, and before the full gathering in of the saints of God, there must be some manifestation of personal power and presence such as we have never seen ; but ought that to deter the Church from using in the meantime the only means within her reach for the spread of Christian truth and character ? On the contrary, even if suddenly, at an hour when we think not, such an event were to occur, the story of the talent buried in the earth is for ever a warning to the Church to let no present gift lie unused.

III. The spirit of patience in Christian work and duty is the only spirit which really apprehends the right character of the Christian faith. The spirit of patience is not measured by the reward or the result. The whole essence of Christianity is a contest with what is evil and wrong. Sometimes the war is aggressive, sometimes it is one of defence. Indeed there are times when it seems to require all our wisdom and skill to keep the forces of evil from overmastering the forces of goodness. There are times when the tide of evil seems to be rising, and the kingdom of light and truth has enough to do to

hold its own. At other times the way is clear for making aggressive attacks, and for assailing some power which has long withstood Christian effort and Christian wisdom. But in either case, the real character of Christian faith and Christian patience demands that the contest should be begun and carried on wholly apart from any promise of reward, or any contract for definite results. I grant that the Church—meaning by that both the whole body of Christian men as well as each individual—I grant that the Church may see cause to modify its plans and its methods of attack and defence; but I cannot grant that, in any case, the battle itself, as between the side of righteousness and purity on the one hand, and the kingdom of evil on the other, can be given up. I see every year arrayed a great force, sometimes in united bands, and often in small detachments, but all really in one spirit making efforts to withstand the assaults of evil in the shape of intemperance, pauperism, crime, or in still more subtle and dangerous forms. And sometimes I hear it doubted whether it is worth while to carry on or prolong the strife. Many grow faint-hearted, doubtful, perplexed, and they say we do no good; the state of parties is where it was,—no change for the better, no progress, no appearance of drying up the stream of ignorance, or crime, or brutality: let us

leave it to itself. But can any human being make up his mind to leave evil to itself? What does he think evil is? What does he take crime, or ignorance, or the spirit of scoffing and irreverence to be? Are they or are they not in their place in this world? Are they or are they not acceptable to God? Are they or are they not favourable to all that is best or greatest in human life? And if they are in antagonism to all that we know or believe to be the mind of the great Lord; if they are in their nature destructive of human character, and human hopes, and human welfare,—what more dare any one ask, what more have we to do, come at our convictions as we may, than to take our place in one position or in another, and act as if we really did believe God to be the ruler of the world, and Jesus Christ to have come with a message of love and mercy for mankind. It is presumptuous, and in the highest degree unbelieving and wrong, in us to say, “I shall not take part in this tremendous conflict until I know what is to come out of it, and what good is to be done.” The essential impulse of the Christian spirit is to set itself on the side of what is right and pure and true, irrespective of the issue. In the long-run there can only be one issue: but be that as it may, immediate results, early results, great results, are outside of our duty; they belong not to us, but to Him whose we are.

To come from great things to small, and from wide and universal statements to those which are more definite and individual ; I know there are amongst us, and in this community and congregation, cases where, again and again, there has arisen, as if prompted by stern necessity, the suggestion that some work on behalf of an individual or a class of individuals may as well be thrown up. It comes to nothing. The stone is rolled high up, but down it falls again, and is sure to come down ; the cistern is filled, but the water leaks out ; the poor waif is brought back almost to land, but some huge billow in its backward flow carries it out to sea again. Is there any use doing more ? Any use doing more, my brother, my sister ! What do you mean ? The struggle is not for that soul only, not for a hundred or a thousand such ; the struggle represents something grander and greater in God's universe—ay, in your own heart. The struggle is not a contest for one individual or for many ; it represents the whole question of the supremacy of good or evil, the whole question of our faith in God, the whole question of our hope in the destiny of man. If that is a matter of doubt or uncertainty, then all is uncertainty, and it is of little consequence what you do or what you leave undone. But if you are persuaded that the world is under the dominion of God, and that His will is eternal righteousness and eternal

love, then the contest between good and evil here, whether it concern individuals or whole races of mankind, assumes another aspect ; and when we take part in it we look beyond the immediate object before us, whether national or ecclesiastical or individual, we have regard to the great principle involved in every such effort to increase the sum of human goodness, and to lighten the darkness of sin and error on the earth.

But the question may well arise in every heart, "What right have I to ask that all my plans and purposes shall succeed, or that any one of them shall?" Where do we see universal success free from mischance? In what region of nature do we find gain without loss, progress without decay? Everywhere we see a capacity for life and growth cut short and perish. Millions of seeds, which might develop into flower and fruit and tree, are year by year destroyed ; and the world is too small for every possible life in the races which dwell on the earth or in the sea to grow to perfection. We never see in other cases what we so rigorously demand in our own. And what are we, it may well be said, what are we that an exception should be made on our behalf, and that we should never encounter disappointment and failure? The best men in all ages have said, Who hath believed our report? They have been content to

cast in their lot with the great plan and purpose of God, and it has been enough for them that they were on His side. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints. Go thy way each one, rest in thy lot, be patient, endure, be steadfast, giving up no good cause for lost, leaving no misery to its own cure, no ignorance to its own removal, no human soul which claims help to its own resources; go thy way, and trust to the sure though slow growth of the kingdom of God. "Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

To what Purpose this Waste?

“Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, there came unto Him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on His head, as He sat at meat. But when His disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood it, He said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon Me. For ye have the poor always with you; but Me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on My body, she did it for My burial. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.—MATTHEW xxvi. 6-13.

THE last verses of the 25th chapter of this Gospel bring before us a subject which is intelligible to all, whether outside or inside the kingdom of God. With that discourse of Christ His public ministry closed, and with the exception of the incident narrated in the text, nothing further is recorded of Christ's teaching. His last words were spoken for all men and for all nations, and the point of the lesson which they conveyed was of the simplest and most practical kind. In that last discourse every-

thing was made to hinge upon the character of those who were brought before the great Judge of all; and the special features of character on which stress was laid, were kindness and compassion on the one hand, and indifference and cold-heartedness on the other. The question of the Judge was, what good had been done to the hungry, the sick, the outcast, the poor; or what good had been left undone: and Christ's last word of warning to the world was not against great and glaring sins, which bring down the execration of mankind upon the criminal, but against the danger of allowing the heart to grow seared and selfish by shutting the misery of the world out of view and letting the miserable and the helpless get succour where they may.

We are not, of course, to look for every truth in any one parable or discourse, but are to regard each truth as only a portion of the great volume of truth. The teaching of the New Testament is not one-sided, and though Christ highly commends the life that is useful, He does not leave us to suppose that usefulness is the only test of goodness. I could imagine a reader of the Gospel, as he reached the close of the 25th chapter, saying to himself, under the solemn impression which that passage creates, "Then let me henceforth devote myself to such kind and benevolent works, let me give myself up to acts of mercy and compassion

towards the helpless and suffering—nothing else will be regarded by the great Judge as worthy of approval.” Such a conclusion seems very natural, but it would be a one-sided conclusion. And I cannot help thinking that the incident recorded in these verses of the 26th chapter serves, if it was not specially intended, to correct such a wrong inference. I cannot help thinking that it is recorded here to teach us how wide and varied is the kingdom of goodness, and how, in addition to acts of mercy and compassion towards the poor, there are other noble deeds which are not less worthy of approval and honour.

If you will look at the incident which took place at Bethany on this occasion, you will see, I believe, that its outstanding lesson is that there are deeds which deserve praise even where these deeds seem to accomplish no useful purpose. (There is a goodness which is not what the world calls practical. There is a goodness which is still goodness though it does not relieve the sick, or feed the hungry, or clothe the naked, or lighten the burden which is resting on any human spirit. There is a goodness which seems to benefit nobody, a goodness which appears to many practical minds to be wasted and thrown away; and yet it is a goodness worthy of the name, and is not to be slighted or overlooked.) This is the lesson of this story, and it is a lesson which comes

in to complete the teaching of Christ as recorded in the close of the previous chapter. If we had had no other discourse of Christ, we might have supposed that the Judge of all men had only one standard of judgment; but with the present event before us, we find that there are times and occasions when the value of a work is measured by something else than its good effects upon others. And whilst it is true that Christ so makes Himself one with the least of His brethren, that everything done to them is regarded as equally done to Him; yet there are cases where something can be done to Him which the poor get no good from: "The poor ye have always with you, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good; but Me ye have not always."

This is the kind of goodness then which I am called to speak of to-day—the goodness which comes from a good heart, and is meant for a good purpose, but which in itself seems to serve no really useful end. (Such goodness is a matter of feeling and sentiment, it springs out of thankfulness or affection, and it empties its treasures of love and wealth on others; but the chief value of it lies in the fact that it is intended, not so much to benefit those on whom it pours its gifts, as simply to express its own depth and fulness.)

There are many people who do not understand this

form of goodness. They can comprehend a work which can be seen in its beneficent results. They can understand the worth of an act which supplies food and warmth to the poor, which provides shelter to the houseless, medicine and healing to the sick, education to the child. There are many who can value aright those great deeds of generosity which are so common in this country, and which save the lives of thousands, or make the lives of thousands more happy and peaceful. There are people also who can appreciate the gifts of generous and far-sighted men, whose delight has been to give of their wealth for public objects having relation to man's intellectual or religious nature. Almost every one indeed can see the use and merit of an act which erects a house of worship, or supplies the ordinances of religion to a district or community. All these acts, whether material, or intellectual, or associated with religion, commend themselves to the minds of the great bulk of the people. But there are cases where even good and religious men do not sympathise with those who spend money and time in works which do not come under any of these heads. There are acts of a sort akin to this gift of the woman at Bethany, which even the disciples of Christ look at with doubt and questioning. No one could have meant better than did this woman when she

lavished the richest ointment on the body of Jesus Christ, but her deed was not regarded with favour by any who witnessed it save One, though the approbation of that One was enough to outweigh the censure of all besides. The disciples said—"To what purpose this waste?" That is the view they took of it. It was a waste of money. It might have been better spent: it might have been sold and given to the poor; as it was, the act in their eyes was useless—"To what purpose this waste?"

One of the evangelists tells us that the chief murmurer on the occasion was Judas, and that his discontent arose from an unworthy motive. But evidently the displeasure with which the act was viewed was more general, and all the disciples seem to have joined in finding fault with it,—not Judas alone, but Peter and John and all the rest, who loved Christ much, and who were free from every taint of meanness of spirit. They found fault with it because the money might have been better spent. It might have been sold for much—one of the evangelists says for more than three hundred pence or Roman denarii, a sum which would have maintained a poor family for a year. Surely, they thought, it would be better to lay out the value of the precious ointment in the form best fitted to do the largest good to the largest number. Now that was the opinion of many good

and worthy men. They could only understand and appreciate the good which was accomplished by a gift; they could not appreciate or understand the spirit out of which a gift came, unless it took the shape which they knew and valued; and Christ teaches them that there are works which are good apart from the good they do to others, simply because they come from hearts which are good and loving and grateful. The act which this woman performed is not one which Christ would have asked any one to render to Him. Indeed, it was one of those acts which are only valuable and acceptable because they are not asked; and it would have lost its chief value if it had been done because it was asked. The act was called good—"She hath wrought a good work on Me." It was well intended, though not a work which could really do much good, and its only good was to gratify the mind of Him who received it, and to express goodness of heart in her who rendered it.

This is the principle which Christ establishes, and we may ask how it is commonly understood, and how it may be illustrated in life.

Now we see it illustrated every day and in every home where affection and confidence prevail. (Every day you see how the love of mother or child is busy devising something which really, and on a close inspection of the matter, can do little practical good.

Every one here has a hundred times planned some little surprise for one who is dear to him, and who receives the well-meant act with pleasure, because, though for itself he does not really care whether it was done or not, he can see that it springs up like a fountain from the depths of an affectionate nature. Going back on the past, and reading over the pages of human love which in our memory we can turn, we can all recall instances of the sort of goodness which Christ approves, and which we can never forget. We can all remember the welcome of love which had prepared some unexpected sight for us, and which we prized more for what it meant than for what it was. We can remember some little work wrought by nimble fingers long since motionless, and which we as lovingly took, because it was the work of love. To this day, and for long years, it is and will be a work precious, not for its material value, but for what it sought to express of care and thoughtfulness and love. Indeed in many of the sweetest and purest relationships of life, the half of those deeds of kindness and interest which are wrought, and often wrought at much cost and with labour, are of this sort. They are not absolutely necessary to the wellbeing or existence of those in whose behalf they are done. Probably life could be spent happily enough without the gifts which such deeds bring. But life is not

mere subsistence ; life is made up of a thousand little slender veins and channels through which affection flows noiselessly and unseen. Life and the inner power of life are made up of infinite little gleams of sympathy, and are not to be measured and weighed like beams of timber by their size. Life is a great and living tree, with countless twigs and foliage which render it fair and attractive. And in all the relationships of life, day by day all persons are conscious that a large portion of their thoughts and time and care is bestowed on what serves no other purpose than merely to express what is within the heart, and seeks for utterance. “ To what purpose this waste ? ” one might say when one sees how much is thus given and done—not because it is essential to maintain life, but because it is simply the outcome of friendly interest and affection, and because to stifle it would be to prevent the free breathing of a pure and warm heart.

So far one sees in the history of daily life how many cases there may be where the lesson which Christ teaches is realised, and where one feels that there is often a mighty treasure of goodness, which does not add to the material stock of usefulness, but simply gives expression to the goodness that is already in the heart.

Is there anything in the religious life to cor-

respond with this ? Is there anything which Christ may be willing to accept as done to Him which is not done to the poor ? Or what is the sphere or department of religion in which this principle is illustrated and expressed ? Is there nothing religious except what conduces to the teaching of religious truth, or the deepening of religious convictions ? Is there no religion except what is called the practical ? and must everything you say and do and give have a direct religious purpose ? May that not be true in the sacred region of religious life, which I have already indicated as true in the daily home-life ? May there not be great religious emotions and desires which seek for utterance, and nothing more ? May there not be a deep gratitude for spiritual blessings which longs to show itself, and which only wants to express its force towards Him from whom the blessings have come ? I am not encouraging a mere sentimental religion, or a religion which has nothing but emotion in it ; but I desire to destroy nothing which God has formed, and to suppress no genuine spiritual aspiration. And I wish that all should feel how natural it is, and how true to the religious instincts, that there should be times and seasons when the devout soul finds pleasure and satisfaction in what seems to effect no direct purpose. There are occasions when the very essence of religion

consists in words and works of worship and praise. To what purpose this waste of time, or thought, or language ? some may ask. And the answer is, that goodness in religion is often what goodness is in the home-life of men ; it is goodness, not for what it accomplishes, but for what it expresses of the state of the heart. Time and thought, then, are not wasted when they are spent on what brings no direct benefit to the world or the Church. There may be a choosing of the good part when all that is done is to sit at Christ's feet, and hear Christ's words, and contemplate Christ's life ; and for the moment that quiet spirit of contemplation may be as truly Christian as the busy bustling activity of what seems to be a more practical religion and a more useful benevolence.

Once more, one finds in the Christian Church and in Church history that there is often an expenditure, not only of time and thought, but of substance and wealth, on matters which seem to many to be wholly undeserving of such expenditure and care. In modern times, it is true, a more utilitarian doctrine is prevalent. And in regard to religious buildings and religious enterprises, the great end in view is usefulness or convenience. With many good and religious people all outlay which does not add to the accommodation or to the comfort of worshippers is reckoned the next thing to extravagance, and all expense on religious

services and religious decoration is cut down to the uttermost as little better than a useless luxury. But there is a deeper and a holier feeling out of which this expenditure may spring. And just as the gifts and kindly deeds rendered to those we love are bestowed out of love, and to express the affection of the heart, so the money bestowed in adding to the dignity or beauty or solemnity of edifices and of religious rites may be the outcome of a heart which delights to express its sense of reverence and love to God, by devoting to the service of God what is costly and rare. Good men, and even the best disciples of Christ, as they look on some of our religious structures, ancient or modern, may say, "To what purpose this waste?" The money spent, they say, on architecture, on stone and glass, on vaulted roof and painted window, might be spared, and devoted to ends more directly benevolent. So good men and even good disciples of Christ may say, and they may have indignation within themselves, and, as they suppose, righteous indignation. But they may be wrong. They may be giving a false interpretation to a good and true act of divine love and divine worship; and there may be a side of religion in which one seeks not what is useful or benevolent—not the raising of the poor, or the instruction of the ignorant, or even the restoration and enlightenment of the evil and the

outcast—but something else. There may be a side of religion in which a devout and pious mind may for a time repose in the simple act of devotion, and when there may be laid upon the altar of God, or devoted to the service of God, or expended upon the whole Church, which is the body of Christ, some precious gift, some alabaster box of ointment, which the practical disciple scoffs at and reproves; and He who sat at the treasury, who praised the widow's mite, and who looked through the gift of the woman at Bethany into her heart, may justify it and praise it, and say, "Let them alone; they have wrought a good work on Me."

I have had but a single purpose in view to-day in what I have said, and that is to show how there are forms of goodness pleasing to God and accepted by Christ when to all appearance they do not add to the sum of human happiness or comfort. And I have illustrated this truth by a reference to two cases—the affections of the home life, and the devotion of the religious life. And so I leave the matter, only adding that in many other spheres of life illustrations of the same great truth will be found. It may come to pass that when Christ gives His judgment on the deeds and projects of men, many noble acts which were derided and condemned may find in Him their defender, and He may claim as done to Him what a

world, wise in its own conceit, called a wasted act, or even a wasted life. Thus far all who have followed this discourse will, I trust, feel and acknowledge that they have within their own narrow and limited round of life some outlet for their holiest thoughts and affections. Let them freely use that outlet; let them in spirit and heart express what they believe, and in their own way, and they may rest assured that it will be accepted in the spirit in which it is rendered. God despises not any, and He sees all that is honest and reverent in the soul of man.

Forgiveness.

“Then came Peter to Him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.”—MATTHEW xviii. 21, 22.

PETER'S question showed that he wholly misunderstood the nature of forgiveness. He thought that it was something which he might give or withhold as he pleased,—he might or might not forgive his brother, according to his own will. In forgiving a wrong, he imagined that he was to be guided by some rule or law which could be previously laid down, and that such a rule or law could be followed as if he were engaged in some ordinary transaction or bargain. By our Lord's answer it is seen that the question cannot be answered as it was put. The question itself is wrong, and every direct answer to it must be wrong too. The right answer can only be given when the question itself is corrected; for our Lord shows that forgiveness is a state of the heart, a disposition or spirit, which cannot be called forth or checked by order or

calculation. Suppose a man were to put the question, How often must I admire what is beautiful and great in creation? how often must I cherish affection for my child? how often must I honour God? how often must I practise the duty of kindness? or how often must I feel sympathy for the unhappy and the suffering? You will see that any answer which could be given to such a question would be misleading, simply because the question proceeded on a false notion of what admiration, or affection, or sympathy is. To give a direct answer to such questions, you could only say, in Christ's words, "Until seventy times seven,"—*i.e.*, numbers have nothing to do with the matter. Forgiveness is a simple state of mind like admiration of God's creation, for which all that a man needs is a sense of beauty and order in his nature. Forgiveness is a state of heart, just as affection or sympathy is. And no man thinks of determining how often and how far he must feel sympathy, or how often and how far he must love those who are dear to him. The sympathy is always there, the love is always in the heart, and it requires only to be appealed to and touched to come forth. You could not imagine a man of genuine tenderness of heart making up his mind and calculating whether he should feel pity for a case of distress or not. You could not imagine a friend debating with him-

self whether he would sympathise with his friend in some calamity which had overtaken him. Sympathy is spontaneous and free ; it does not come and go at one's call : love is only love, sympathy is only sympathy, when it cannot help itself.

Just so is it with the spirit of forgiveness. It ceases to be forgiveness if it is a matter of count and reckoning ; it is a state of heart which must be manifested as soon as occasion for it arises. And just as the sight of goodness and wisdom excites admiration and respect, just as the presence of suffering awakens compassion in the heart,—so the sight of penitence, if you believe it to be penitence, calls forth the spirit of forgiveness ; and you no more ask, How often must I forgive ? than you ask, How often must I love, or pity, or admire ? It is a state of heart and character which is not to be regulated by any rule as to the number of times on which it shall be exercised.

From this we may see that the act of forgiveness does not depend so much on the man who forgives as on the man who needs to be forgiven. Whether we shall forgive or not forgive, is a question which is determined rather by the person who has done the wrong than by the person who has suffered the wrong. If there is genuine repentance, there will be drawn forth genuine forgiveness ; if there is no repentance,

or if the repentance is feigned and not real, then the blessed comfort of being forgiven cannot be felt or enjoyed. Our Lord's answer therefore more than answers the question ; it gives the question a new turn. It shows the apostle that his question is a wrong one, —one which arises out of a wrong notion of what forgiveness really is.

This spirit of forgiveness is pressed on the disciples, both in what goes before and in what follows. It is taught both directly, as in the verses which precede this, and indirectly in the parable which comes afterwards. In both cases it is practically the same great truth which is taught ; and it is founded on the relation between God and man. The earthly is connected with the heavenly, the duty of forgiving rests on the privilege of being forgiven, and the two are so closely associated that, according to Christ's showing, the one cannot exist without the other. Forgiveness on our part implies forgiveness on the part of God ; and again, the forgiveness which God bestows cannot be enjoyed if it leaves us in a state of mind different from that which is expressed in the dealings of God with ourselves.

I. Both in the parable and in the teaching of our Lord here without a parable, it is admitted that all men may have claims on one another. These claims

are not to be compared, in point of magnitude, with the claims which God has on all, but still they are claims. They are called debts, or offences, or trespasses; they are something due from one individual to another. In one sense, nobody doubts this. Everybody, in the course of his life, if not on every day of his life, feels that he has some reason to complain of what is done to him. Every one feels aggrieved at some act which has been done, or some course which has been taken, against him. The evil is not imaginary, but real. He has sustained injury in some way, by word or deed,—probably in many ways. He has not got his due, and in his heart he believes himself to be wronged and offended by the conduct of others.

So far, all will admit that there is such a thing as a claim between man and man, as well as between God and man. But every one will not so easily admit that there is a claim against himself. Whether it be from the extravagant demands we are apt to make on one another, or from the blindness on our side to the great debt of kindness which is due to others, we are apt to overlook the claims which men have upon us, and we are hard to convince that we owe anything; or if we are convinced, we reduce the debt to the smallest dimensions. Still the fact remains true, there is such a thing as a moral debt

due between man and man, as well as between man and God. And every man—even the man who owes most to God, and is the greatest sinner towards God—may have some point in his life and history where he is the offended and the injured, and not the injurer or the offender. The man who owes ten thousand talents, and who is a debtor beyond all hope of ever extinguishing his debt towards God, may be himself a creditor somewhere and towards somebody; and the man who has committed most wrongs may be able, in his turn, to say that there is some one who has wronged him.

Christ recognises that fact. He does not say, You owe everything, and nobody owes anything to you; He takes it for granted that every day we not only need to say, "Forgive us our debts," but may have it in his power to add, "as we forgive our debtors." Each day he may need to forgive as well as to be forgiven. Our Lord acknowledges this: "If thy brother trespass against thee."

II. Admitting to the full the claims which one man has against another in the way of personal offences and wrongs, you will see that there runs through all our Lord's teaching the great truth that there was something of more importance still than the rectifying of a wrong act or word. It is of con-

sequence, certainly, to have the wrong righted and the injury removed, and the privilege which has been taken away restored; but Jesus Christ has more respect still to the character, and repentance, and restoration of the individual who has erred and offended. He does not regard his welfare as of more consequence than the welfare of the man who was ill-used and offended, but He regards the spiritual injury which the offender has brought on his own head as the more serious calamity of the two; and the whole style of Christ's teaching leads us to see that He desires the brother who has been wronged to take the same view of the matter. I think we may well repeat what was uttered long ago: "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" It is a high doctrine, and it is few who can attain unto it. It is very, very difficult, when a man is smarting under some bitter wrong, to believe that there can be anything worse than the wrong itself. It is difficult to feel that the injury which the wrong does is bringing on his own character and life a greater injury than any which he has succeeded in inflicting on us. We feel our own injury first and foremost; and we can hardly be induced to take such an exalted and transcendental view of the matter as to say to ourselves, "There is a greater injury still than the injury we have suffered, and that is the injury which the man has wrought on his own

spirit." Very few can take the matter up in that light, but it is the aspect of the case which is here brought before us; and high as it is, all can see it to be the true one. If a man, in robbing us of a trifle, were to meet with an accident which disabled him and made him a sufferer for life, we should feel that his punishment far exceeded our loss; and most of us would have the heart to commiserate him, even though he had only himself to blame. And if the injury is not to life or limb, but to the immortal part of the man—if he destroys his own spiritual life,—we should commiserate him all the more. And when you consider that Christ is not speaking of the wrong which is done by a stranger or by a hardened criminal, but by a brother—*i.e.*, by a man of our own community, by one who was a disciple, and was treated on terms of equality and brotherhood—every man will have a response to the truth in his own heart, and will say that such an offender, if he has trespassed by word or act against us, has wronged himself much more than he has wronged us, and has brought upon himself a much more grievous calamity than he has succeeded in inflicting on ourselves.

Still more does this truth come out when you consider the precepts which Christ gives for guidance in the matter, and when you consider the great result of success. "Tell him his fault between thee and

him alone : if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." This is the grand issue of it all. He puts this above all personal gain. He puts this first, which most people put last. "Thou hast gained thy brother." What we first consider is our own cause ; if we gain that, we are content, and we carry away the pleasant reflection that we have been victorious. And yet, if the same mind were in us which was in Christ, that would be as nothing if our brother was lost. On the other hand, if we have conquered the prejudices of an offender—if we have persuaded him to do right, and to listen to the voice of reason and of truth—all is done, all is won ; a human heart which was going astray has been brought back, a life which was being injured is reclaimed, and one who was in danger of falling out of all fellowship with the good and the pure has been restored to his place and kept from falling. That is a victory worth the name ; and that victory can only be gained if we keep in view the great fact that, in the inflicting and suffering of a wrong, the brother who commits the trespass has inflicted an injury on himself as well as on us, and a greater injury by far than any we could sustain.

III. This duty of forgiveness, which Christ has been pressing on His disciples and on all men, is enforced by a parable, where our claims on others are

placed in contrast with God's claims on us. Our claims are represented by the hundred pence or Roman *denarii*, a sum equivalent to sixty or seventy shillings of our own coinage; and the claims of God are set at ten thousand talents—a sum of more than two millions of our money, and a sum far beyond the power of a debtor who has fallen into arrears to make up. It is stated at this vast amount to remind us that it can only be through an act of clemency that it can ever be cancelled.

In a case like this, I would not exaggerate, for it is no excuse for exaggeration that we desire to put the case of God against man in the strongest light. He needs not our rhetoric or our exaggeration. Instead of attempting to convict a single human being, I prefer to leave each man's conscience to speak the truth to himself. Let every one of us reckon for ourselves; let us reckon honestly. Let us recount vows made and broken; let us examine our own conduct in the face of the law, in the light of revelation and reason; let us remember our faults, and note them fairly: and then we shall see that there is no hope of deliverance except by the door of forgiveness, and that there is not a man on earth who can appeal to justice rather than to mercy.

Well, then, the case as against ourselves is, beyond doubt, strong; and if we feel our need of divine com-

passion, have we not learned the worth of that same compassion as expressed towards our fellow-creatures? "I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst it." And if we have been capable of receiving forgiveness, we have surely learned the power of bestowing it on others. How often do men go back to their work during the busy week, forgetting their own words and spirit of contrition! How often do they lose temper with others, behave themselves harshly, exact to the uttermost what they can claim, refuse to listen to apology or explanation or entreaty, and, in short, fulfil almost to the letter the incidents of the parable of the unmerciful servant recorded in the closing words of this chapter! The story, as told in this parable, has one feature which has seemed to many difficult to understand. The servant who owed ten thousand talents has been forgiven and his debt extinguished; and it may be asked, on what grounds of law or equity can the case be re-opened? and it is further asked, whether sin once pardoned may still come up for judgment and condemnation? The difficulty arises from the fact that, though sin is a debt, yet it is much more than a debt, and though debt helps us to understand forgiveness, and how the burden of sin should be removed, it does not fully express it. Penitence is a state of heart, and where that exists forgiveness is sure to follow; but if that

does not exist, or if it passes away and a state of impenitence returns, all the consequences of an impenitent state of heart return also. The laws of debt and the laws of moral offence are in some points alike, but in some wholly different. If a man's debts are paid, the creditor has no right to inquire from whence the payment came—it is all one to him, and he has no right to withhold a discharge; but in a moral debt, where a man has given offence, where he has said something or done something which is wrong, no man can come in his room. He and he alone must offer the excuse and feel the regret, and obtain by his own personal contrition forgiveness for the wrong which he has committed. His only claim to forgiveness is, that he has repented; but if he withdraws from that position, and virtually says, I repent of my repentance, he goes back to his original position, and must not complain if he is treated as a man who has cast forgiveness away, and has chosen to abide by the rigorous law of justice.

Such is the position of the debtor in the parable of Christ. He obtained forgiveness, and he obtained it on the ground of his penitent state of mind: but that penitent state of mind implied far more than being sorry for his own offence; it meant sorrow for offences committed against himself as well, and his penitence towards God contained in it the spirit of compassion

towards all who were in a state of condemnation like his own. He could not accept forgiveness and freedom from fear, without knowing the spirit of forgiveness, and how it acted. If he took forgiveness, he entered into the spirit of the forgiver; and if he failed to breathe that spirit, he must have felt that his sorrow for his offence was unreal and untrue. We cannot get forgiveness without knowing what it really means, and we cannot expect forgiveness from God or man where we have done wrong, without sharing to some extent the nobleness and the freedom of that nature which so frankly forgave us.

It is not, then, a mere rule—it is a law of our nature, founded in the nature of things—that a forgiving spirit goes along with forgiveness, and that if we have no element of that tenderness of heart which is ready to pass by an offence when it is acknowledged and repented of, we are still ignorant of true contrition for our own offences against God and man, and are yet practically impenitent and unforgiven.

This, I say, is a law of our nature; it is essential to the very idea of forgiveness and mercy; and when Christ closes His admonition, as He does here, with words which may well make the harsh and unforgiving think, He utters words which are true to nature, true to experience, and which cannot cease to be true

without destroying the whole character of penitence, forgiveness, and peace.

Such is the topic brought before us this morning. We shall have occasion to put the lesson in practice to-day, to-morrow, and every day; let us try to do so in the spirit of Christian living and Christian charity. We have claims against others who have offended; but if we have the spirit of forgiveness, it is drawn out by the sight of genuine apology and genuine contrition. We feel that the first and foremost thing is the state of heart in those who have done wrong and desire henceforth to do right. And all these thoughts are strengthened by considering that we too are debtors—debtors to an amount infinitely great towards God, and to some amount also towards man—and that we cannot accept the free gift of pardon and mercy without cherishing in our own hearts that spirit of forgiveness and mercy which are so needful to ourselves.

The Entail of Evil.

“Be sure your sin will find you out.”—NUMBERS xxxii. 23.

THE history of the Old Testament is full of meaning for all future ages. You may indeed regard it as merely the chronicles of an ancient people, full of war and bloodshed and petty quarrels; but as you read it, you find in it a meaning far wider. You find the history of Israel to abound in the illustration of great principles; you find it to contain facts which are worthy of universal attention; and though it was a small country, insignificant in size and worldly power, it was a country in which some of the greatest truths of religion and morals were apprehended centuries before they were recognised elsewhere.

It is on that account that we find in the narrative of Jewish history so much to instruct us. It is no mere artifice whereby passages from the Old Testament are chosen to set forth great lessons in religion and in life. The people were at first separated from the rest of the world, and kept separate for ages, as witnesses to a higher and better life than was found

in the surrounding countries; and in the history which we have been reading for some time in our ordinary course of morning lessons, we find much to arrest our attention. I propose to-day to turn your thoughts to the passage from which my text is taken, not so much for its historical interest as for the great moral and spiritual utterance with which it closes, when it announces that all acts of deceit and evil contain within themselves the germ of their own recompense in the future.

The whole story is given at great length. Moses was binding certain tribes to a solemn promise. If they fulfil their word, they shall be secured in their inheritance—the inheritance which had fallen to their lot: but if they break their word, a great sin will be committed; and be sure, he says, “your sin will find you out.” His meaning is not merely that it shall be discovered, but that it shall be visited with its natural results. Those who were guilty of it would feel its burden, would taste its bitterness, and experience the evil consequences of it, through all their future history. We have the same lesson taught us from many other sources in both the Old and New Testaments; but it is very striking to go back to this ancient period in the history of the race, and to find it announced to us in connection with the invasion of the land of promise by the Israelites.

I. Notice the fact that this appeal, in regard to a great spiritual truth, is not made in the first instance to individuals, but to two tribes in their national capacity. The life of a tribe, or of a people, is a reality. In the hundredth Psalm we read, "He hath made us, and not we ourselves," which is to be interpreted as referring not to creation—the creation of life—but to the formation of a united people. There is a national vanity often indulged in and often thought meritorious in cases where personal vanity would be despised. There is a national vanity, and an ecclesiastical vanity, and a social vanity, which makes people not ashamed or afraid to say, "We did make ourselves; we have formed ourselves into a community, a nation, a Church." But the whole strain of religious history and religious feeling goes in the opposite direction, and leads us to the conviction that the separate and corporate life of a nation is a unity created by God—having an existence of its own, carrying with it a distinct destiny, and subject to approval and blame, to reward and punishment, like the existence of a single individual person. A tribe, a nation, a Church, a people, cannot commit a wrong act or follow a wrong course, without, as a tribe, or nation, or Church, or people, suffering the consequences of its act. The sin which a nation commits is found out in the long-run. It

brings forth its own natural fruits. A nation has a character of its own; and a reputation which it loses or gains, even though the individuals of whom it is composed are changing every year and every day. The tribes which at this time addressed Moses were made up of certain families and individuals, who will have passed away ere the time when the fruits of their conduct will have ripened; but the tribe is all the while regarded as one and the same individual existence, earning the advantage of its truthfulness or reaping the recompense of its falsehood; it will, in all its future history, derive benefit or disaster from its present conduct, and will be dealt with as if it had not undergone personal changes in its mass.

One generation is to the next generation as spring is to autumn, and as boyhood is to manhood. And just as a man suffers for his carelessness, his folly, his dissipation, in youth, so does a generation suffer for its predecessors. There was some truth, though not the whole truth, in the proverb used by the Israelites, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth have been set on edge." We reap what our fathers sowed: we inherit the fruits of their virtues, we suffer for their vices and faults; we enjoy the blessings of freedom for which they contended, and we bear the burden of the wars

they carried on and the debts they incurred. Their good and their bad deeds affect us. We are the better for all their noble efforts; we are the worse for all their failures and crimes. And so will it always be. The enterprises we engage in will show their true character in the future; the laws we make, the treaties into which we enter, the righteous or unrighteous wars we prosecute, the good we do or leave undone—all are working out their appropriate results; and long after we, as individuals and rulers, and pastors and people, have ceased to exist, the consequences of our actions will survive, and will fall upon our successors as really as if every office and every place of honour or of power had been continuously held by them, and they, and not we, had directed the affairs of the Church or of the nation. All history has proved that in the life of nations there is an individuality which is unbroken from one generation to another.

How very natural is the thought in a man's mind in regard to any institution or scheme, "It will last my day; let the next generation provide for itself!" And with such maxims on men's lips things are done or left undone which in the course of time are sure to exhibit their real nature and bring about their real results. One of the most serious wants in a people is the want of a public conscience—the want

of a large spirit of unselfishness, which can look beyond its own brief day, and have in view the good or evil which will come out of present plans and actions. "There shall be peace in my time," is thought enough. Men in all ranks of life forget their responsibility, and their vast influence over the future welfare of others, and live and act, and pass away, as if the destinies of coming generations were not, to a great degree, within their power. And at this early period of Jewish history the tribes are taught the very lessons which Christ so often pressed on the rulers and people of His own day; Moses is Christ's forerunner in such divine lessons of wisdom and truth, and in urging on the people their absolute oneness in character and destiny throughout their generation. "Be sure your sin will find you out."

II. We may make the subject one of wider and more general application, and find that this saying is universally true.

1. By the very constitution of man's being, the sin of the individual who commits a wrong reappears in his own mind and character. Not only every act, but every thought or purpose or desire which passes through the mind, gives a tinge to the mind itself. This stamp on the mind or inner character is even visible on the body and in the expression of the coun-

tenance. And though it is wrong and unfair to judge men by the outward appearance, yet everybody knows that there are certain marks of dissipation and coarseness which imprint themselves on the features and tell their own story; and how much more, if we could see it, must these lines of wickedness be set in the human spirit! If you could penetrate below the surface, you would see in a far more striking form the print of wicked thoughts and passions on the human soul. Each one of us is thus day by day writing his own history. What we do and say, what we think and devise, is inscribed on the tables of the heart. There it stands, not in memory only, but in the very substance of the mind itself, and cannot be blotted out or destroyed. Witnesses of what we have done may err, they may invent or exaggerate, and our own memories may grow dim and mislead us; but the mind itself, of each individual, is in its own present character a testimony to what its history has been. If you had the gift of inspecting the human mind as you can examine the trunk of a tree, or a chip of stone from a quarry, you could tell with as great accuracy the general history of the mind, as you can tell the age of the tree by its rings, or by the period to which the rock belongs.

I do not know anything almost which ought to impress one more solemnly with the importance of

taking heed to one's thoughts than this. If there is secrecy anywhere, we are apt to think it is here, in the recesses of the heart: no human eye can pierce this inner chamber, and no human foot can cross its threshold. If anywhere, surely, a man is safe from intrusion in his own breast; he can range there undisturbed, and nobody can reveal or ever discover his pursuits in that secluded retreat. But after all, he cannot keep his thoughts and desires to himself. Although the world cannot at first see or hear what the man in the retirement of his own soul is doing or saying, the man himself is registering his own conduct on his affections and inner nature. The prevailing wishes and purposes are, all unconsciously to the man himself, giving a tone to the mind which cherishes them. What is written with pen and ink may be effaced or destroyed, but the self-registering events of the unseen spirit within are indestructible, and no art or skill of man can wash them out; they are part of the soul of man itself, and they remain as long as it exists, to tell their own history, without exaggeration and without the possibility of contradiction. We thought that we could be independent of human oversight as we indulged in what was forbidden and wrong in the unuttered imaginations and devisings of the heart; but it was not so. There they are, and they give shape and colour to the spirit and character, and

are for ever a testimony which cannot be got rid of. To many, this simple fact will be enough to give a more thoughtful character to their life. This simple consideration, that our thoughts and desires are in the strictest sense imperishable, will act as a warning against all secret errors and sins. The thought that each wrong impulse or imagination is moulding the spirit within, and giving it a form which it will retain, will have its due weight, and will, I am sure, caution and deter many from secret evil. In the attitude and character of the mind itself, every man's individual sins, even the most secret, will find him out.

2. There may be some who will be more influenced by another consideration, and that is, that his secret sins will grow and gather, until in some way or other they will discover themselves in act, and find him out. I say this, well knowing how many acts of falsehood and wrong and evil are undetected. I say this, knowing that there are persons who, for a long term of years, follow a course of secret wrong-doing which is never found out. Thousands pass away undiscovered in their sin, as thousands of good men go unrewarded from this world to the other; but we see only a portion of a man's life, and not the whole, and we know that in one way or another, and at one period or another, near or far away, the seed of evil will burst and

be made visible, the stone thrown up in the air will come to the ground, and the thought or plan or secret transgression of the evil-doer will come back on himself and overwhelm him.

And besides and beyond all detection, so far as man is concerned, there are two Judges of the human heart which the evil-doer has cause to fear. There is, first, the great unseen eye which misses nothing, misinterprets nothing, forgets nothing which it has seen. "Thou God seest me." And no effort at concealment can mislead or deceive God. Out of His presence we cannot go, nor can we run from Him. And though the plot has been hatched in the dark night, and carried out in secrecy, we have left Him out of our calculation, and with all our precautions we have proved ourselves to be as fools; for darkness and light are both alike to Him, and the night shines around Him as the day.

And there is another judge still — not a judge unfelt and unknown, not a judge far away and a stranger, but one very close beside us. In every man there is a witness—call it conscience, or by any other name—which, though darkened and degraded, still retains some vestige of its holy and divine nature, and wakens up after the longest and deepest slumber to give true and impartial testimony. And when it is once aroused, who can stifle it? Who can silence its

accusations or frown them down? Who can be happy and at peace when conscience lifts up its voice and challenges the sinner in secret? The mightiest is helpless as a babe before it, and the most hardened quails when it rises up as an old prophet and confronts the sinner with the charge, "Thou art the man."

My words to-day have been words of warning more than words of rebuke. I have desired to help each one to draw the veil which hides him from himself, and to remind each that he has no power really to keep that veil from being drawn, inasmuch as in his own nature and constitution God has made provision in His providence and law for discovering the secrets of the human heart, by writing them on the character and inner life, and by the process of divine and personal judgment. But I wish to leave a subject like this not one of mere warning or even of terror. I believe that there are many who have already and often said to themselves all I have said to-day, and in a manner far more solemn and impressive, and I would rather that we separated from our worship with other truths, and other words as well, before our minds. And I would ask each one who may have been accusing his own heart, or secretly forecasting the revelation of the great future, to remember that the whole tone and spirit of the Gospel

is not that of condemnation, but of salvation and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Healing is the end of spiritual depression and sorrow. Life is by the law of God the purpose of death. Mercy is the design of judgment and threatening. "I am not come," says Christ, "to judge the world, but to save the world." I would not remove one whit the deep impression which is made by the Bible, or by preaching, or by conscience, on any human spirit, of the terrible consequences of evil, secret or open; but as little would I like to leave on the heart of any human being the dull, deadening notion that the past was irretrievable, and sin unremovable. Rather would I, in the spirit of Him whose Gospel is the measure of all human teaching, apply the soothing and comfort which a wounded conscience needs, assuring every one who hears me, that what is impossible with man is possible with God, and that whilst no mortal power can undo the past, or destroy the effects which sin has wrought on the soul, that result is within His reach who has sent His Son to redeem us, both from the power and the fruits of evil.

Bringing Children to Christ.

“And they brought young children to Him, that He should touch them ; and His disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not : for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them.”—MARK x. 13-16.

WE know what it was to bring a little child to Jesus when He was on earth, and we may ask what it is now, and wherein the difference consists. This question may be considered in two aspects—(1) As regards the children who are brought ; and (2) As regards the parents who bring them, to Christ.

1. ~~In regard to the children themselves.~~ There is not a commoner expression on the lips of many good persons than to bid children “come to Jesus.” Now, however correct and Scriptural the expression may be, ~~you will see at once that~~ it cannot mean in every point the same thing now that it did when

Jesus Christ was on that day sitting in the house discoursing to the people, and when certain children were brought to Him. On that occasion the child, if he were not a mere infant, understood what it was to be brought to Jesus. He saw Jesus with his bodily eye as he sat amongst the crowd; he heard Jesus speak; he might mark the kindly light of His eye, and be encouraged by the kindly smile that played around His lips; and he might, in his trembling and fear, be soothed by the tones of the voice of Jesus. If there was any gladness at all—any pleasure, any interest—in the act of coming or being carried into the presence of Jesus, it was the pleasure and interest that a child derives from seeing a human face, from hearing a human voice, from being touched by human hands, and from being raised into the arms of a Man in whose embrace he found himself safe, and in whose presence he was not afraid.

There could not be in the children on that day anything like what we now call a spiritual feeling; there could not be in the minds of these children any difficulty or doubts as to what was meant by “coming to Jesus,” and by receiving at His hands a blessing. To come to Jesus, then, was simply to take their place by the knees of a Man who had nothing in His appearance to terrify or repel them; and it

meant exactly what would be meant now if a visitor or guest were to call the children of the house in which he lived around him, to touch them with his hands, and take them into his arms. There was nothing to perplex their young minds, nothing to try their faith, nothing to raise in them wonder as to what the invitation meant that they should come to Jesus.

✓ Contrast ~~all~~ this with the meaning and use of the words in our own day, and indeed in every age of the world since Christ left it.

Suppose that on the mind of one of those children on that memorable day an impression had been made, and that the child was of an age to retain in after-life the memory of the event,—the invitation to come to Jesus, or the statement that he was to be brought to Jesus, could only awaken one thought, and that a thought full of interest, especially if he had been told of the wonderful progress of Christianity. He might be taught to understand that the Person whose face and voice were still imprinted on his heart had gone from the world, but lived still—unseen, and in some far-off region—and that in the heart of that Person there was an affection for children, and an interest in children, quite as great as when He sat in the house on the farther side of Jordan; and in the secret thoughts of the

child there might be an effort to imagine Jesus near him. But how vague and how imperfect would the result be, and how different from the striking scene which had lingered in his memory, when he saw the uplifted hand and heard the words of gentleness and blessing proceed from the lips of the Man Christ Jesus!

Suppose, further, that in the same home of this child there were others younger than himself who had never seen Christ, who had not been touched by the hands of Christ—what precise meaning could such little children attach to language addressed to them by the lips of parents or evangelists, if they had been told to come to Jesus? Could they do much more than wonder and envy the lot of the brother or sister who, at their age, had been carried to receive a blessing from One who lived and spoke on earth, and said, “Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God”? It is plain that to their minds the idea conveyed by the words could not be the same as that which arose in the minds of those who had seen Jesus; and, if they tried to receive the words in a spiritual sense, it would be an effort of imagination very difficult to make, and the impression got from the effort would be feeble, and perhaps misleading. No such child could have understood

the words as he would have done had he been of the number who were brought to Jesus, and who, in the face of the disciples' rebuke, had received at the hands of Jesus a blessing.

Considering these things, and considering the difficulty and perplexity and misapprehensions which are apt to spring up in the minds of children, would it not be of some advantage to the cause of Christianity if children were spoken to in a language which they could comprehend? In more advanced years the notion of what is spiritual may be gradually developed in the mind; but in early life, and in the tender time of childhood, religious ideas should be presented to children in forms that are true and natural to them. Let them feel that they are the children of the great unseen Father, and that they have One who is their Saviour and their Friend; but beware how you mix up with your religious teaching a philosophy of your own or of human invention, and beware lest you darken the understanding and make sad the heart of those whom God would not make sad. In the New Testament children are our patterns and examples: they are set before us that we may copy them in their simplicity and in their trustfulness. Let us not reverse the picture; let us not in our treatment of them undo the teaching of Christ, or rob them of the blessing, or displace them

from the standing-point which He gives them as belonging to the kingdom of God.

2. In answer to the question—What is the difference between bringing a child in Christ's day to Jesus and bringing him now?—I have said that there were two sides of the question: the first, What is the difference to the child himself? and the second, What is the difference to the parent, or to those who then brought their children, and those who still wish, following the language in use, to bring their children to Jesus?

At that time the parent—father or mother—saw whether the child was accepted. The parent saw Christ bless the child: it was a matter of sight, not of faith. The parent—father or mother—could be in no doubt whatever whether the child was welcome or not. He knew it, just as he knows every day whether the child is well treated or ill treated—whether he is frowned on or welcomed with kindness. The parents heard with infinite satisfaction, doubtless, Jesus rebuking the disciples who would have kept the children back. The parents heard with encouragement and thankfulness that word which could never afterwards cease to cheer them—“Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not.” But how is it now? How do parents bring their children, how

can they bring their children, now? For them, surely, the answer is much more easy than it is for children themselves. A parent has faith in God. He understands that the unseen is as real as that which is seen; and it is surely as easy for him now to believe that children are capable of receiving a blessing, as if he saw the hands of Jesus placed on the head of one of his children. For all time in the future, Christ taught the lesson that it is possible for children to get good, to have good sown in their natures in childhood, and before they come to years of understanding.

One would like to know for certain the cause or ground of the rebuke which the disciples administered to the parents on that day. Why, you may ask, did the disciples find fault with the parents, or with those, whoever they were, who brought the children? I cannot be sure. Probably it was because, by so doing, the parents were interrupting the teaching of Christ, or because the disciples supposed that the placing of Christ's hands on the children could do them no good. These may have been the reasons, or they may not. But if I pass from the objections of the disciples in that old day, to the objections of some disciples in modern days to proceedings of a similar nature in our own time, I can be at no loss to tell what they are. There are many worthy to be called

disciples who can see no good in any religious service which is administered to children. They ask what use there can be in infant baptism; and they suggest that it is little better than an idle ceremony or a superstitious act, from which the child can derive no benefit whatever. Such disciples will assure us that, except in cases where there is personal faith, or personal acceptance of the Gospel, there can be no warrant for administering any rite of our Christian religion.

I cannot help observing here that the action of Jesus Christ, as well as His words, is a rebuke to the disciples, if that ~~was~~ their objection, and not a rebuke to the parents. He does not find fault with the parents, but He finds fault with the disciples; and He yields to the request of those who brought the children. He ^{did} not say to them, "Take these children hence." He ^{did} not say, "They can get no good from me until they are older." He ^{did} not say, "Bring them back to me when they can understand what I teach, and when they can express their assent to my teaching." He ^{did} not say, "Wait till they can believe before you ask me to bless them." The parents wanted a blessing, not an empty form, not a prayer, not a mere outward rite—they wanted a blessing, they wanted Christ to touch them, and in touching them, to give them something which was of

use; and Christ responded to their wishes—He touched their children, He put His hands on them, He blessed them, and He said, “Of such is the kingdom of heaven.” His words, surely, tell us that before the age of ripe understanding, before the child can tell his faith or his spiritual wants, God can do the child good; seeds of goodness, through God’s power, through Christ’s blessing, may be sown; and in any case, Christ declares that children will have a place in the kingdom of God, and having a place, they have a name, and the outward emblem of the place and the name: He put His hands on them and blessed them.

What is meant by “receiving the kingdom of God as a little child”?

It would be unwise and untrue to the teaching of Christ to examine the characteristics of childhood, and to find in them all something analogous to the spirit in which we are to receive the kingdom of God. There are points in our life which cannot be found in a child’s life; there are elements in a child’s life which cannot be continued in the life of manhood. There are many things which must drop off from children as they pass into riper years, and every one feels that it would be a false interpretation of the words if we were to understand them as limiting the duties and the spirit of the Christian life to those

capacities which children possess. We all feel that over and above the child-like virtue, whatever it be, which must appear in every one who enters into the kingdom of God, there must be attainments worthy of the great duties which devolve on us as men.

I understand our Lord's words, therefore, to tell us that the outstanding characteristic of children, and not all the points of the child's character, must be seen in those who receive the kingdom of God—just as, when our Lord compares the kingdom itself to a pearl, or to leaven, or to a net, or to mustard-seed, the comparison holds good only in one special point of view, and is not to be pressed to every quality in the pearl or leaven or net or mustard-tree.

In the comparison before us, then, can we point to any—one or more—qualities in children which, without straining, may be taken to have been within the compass of our Lord's meaning when He said, "Who-soever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall not enter therein"?

1. I think we shall not err if we believe that, for one thing, He refers to the naturalness or truthfulness or single-mindedness of a little child, as opposed to the spirit of artifice or duplicity, or whatever you may call that spirit, which is acquired by much dealing with the world, and which leads men to conceal their real feelings, and to assume feelings and sen-

timents which are not deep or true. I do not mean, of course, to say that in a child or in all children there is an utter absence of cunning or of guile. We must understand the words in their general bearing ; and all will acknowledge that in the matter of openness and naturalness, the conduct of a little child is a pattern to grown men. Every one at all acquainted with the habits of children is familiar with incidents in which this characteristic of the child's nature comes out. So true, so natural is it to a child to speak out what is in him, utterly unmindful or unconscious of the pain or pleasure which his words give, that it seems to us something quite out of the range of our own personal experience. To a child it matters little who hears him, or to whom he speaks ; he does not regard the station or the age of those on whom his observant eye is fixed ; whatever is in his heart, his lips speak, if he speaks at all. He has no idea that a remark which he overhears ought not to be repeated in the presence of one whom it concerns ; it does not occur to him to say one thing when any one is present, and another thing when he is absent ; he never supposes that it can be wrong to say what is true, for as yet he has not learned what expediency means, and all the arts of policy and flattery are unknown to him. It is a terrible confusion to a child's mind when he is rebuked for the

first time for uttering the truth at an awkward moment. He does not know what that means; all truth is to him as an atmosphere through which he sees, and it is as natural for him to look at the truth and to utter it, as it is for the eye to open to the light, or for the birds to warble their own notes. He cannot understand how any one should find fault with him for opening out all his heart, and for telling truthfully what he is pleased with and what he dislikes, what he thinks and what he remembers, what he knows and what he has seen. His mind is a perfect mirror, throwing back all that falls on it, and he is utterly unconscious of any wish to give an untrue colouring to his feelings or his desires. He does not pretend to like what he hates, to know what he does not know, to believe what he does not believe, to choose what he wishes to avoid; he is frank and open, and true to himself.

Now in this matter, whosoever would receive the kingdom of God as a little child, must put on the spirit of a child and be true to nature. I have said "put on;" but it is not so much to put on a new nature as to put off the old: it is simply to allow one's self to fall back on what is simple and sincere. How much there is in human life that is artificial and untrue! how much men do and give and suffer, just because they are expected to do it! how few can

be true enough to themselves to confess that they do really differ from the world! how few feel that they can afford to be free to think their own thoughts, and to express their own wants, and to follow their own opinions, and to live and breathe in an atmosphere of purity and light, as before their heavenly Father! How much more simple would the entrance into the service of God be, if men were to act out their own deep convictions, if they were to refuse to be slaves to the world, if they were to hearken only to the teaching of God's Spirit, to the monitions of conscience, to the voice of truth, wherever it comes from! How much more straightforward would the path be to the kingdom, and in the kingdom, if men would only renounce the crooked policy which they learn in the world, and act as if they felt that all is empty which is not real, and all vanity which is not true! What an overthrow of obstacles and hindrances to the kingdom of God if men were just in honesty to say, "Lord, what wouldest Thou have me to do?" and were to live and act on their own responsibility before the Lord of the conscience! This would indeed be to receive the kingdom of God as a little child.

2. A second element in the child's nature which I think might be in our Lord's mind when He spoke these words, is the element of trust. But I merely mention it, inasmuch as each one may apply for

himself the truth to his own case, and learn from the child's confidence in his parent to trust the goodness and rich love and wisdom of our Father in heaven. Let me only add, that reliance on God is perfectly compatible with action, and with much action too, on our own part. God's thoughts do not swallow up ours; but if we lose sight of God's thoughts and purposes, and look only to our own, we shall fall a prey to restless anxiety and fretting, and we shall miss the right spirit of the kingdom of God.

*Sermon at the Opening of the General
Assembly, May 19, 1881.*

“Seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the Church.”—

I CORINTHIANS xiv. 12.

I DO not regard the opening services of the General Assembly as an occasion for giving instruction like the ordinary times of public worship. The minister whose duty it is to preach carries with him a sense of even graver responsibility than when he officiates in his own pulpit and to an ordinary congregation. He is in the presence of his brethren, each of whom has borne the burden of the religious teacher for perhaps many years, and each of whom knows as well as he how to set forth the rich treasures of divine faith. It is not his object, at such a time as this, to expound any single portion of Scripture, or discuss any special theme in the theology of the Church. He is less the teacher than the representative of many teachers and rulers; he does not dogmatise, or issue lessons with authority, as if he were addressing persons who had come to be

taught. I regard the office which falls to me to-day in a different light. I am but one out of many who have thoughts touching the Church they love, concerning her place and functions, her hopes and fears, her capacity for serving the ends for which she exists; and I desire to fulfil this office in the spirit of one who preaches to himself, who acts as his own monitor, his own comforter, and his own judge,—all whose words of counsel ought to fall first on his own soul, and all whose suggestions of wholesome truth ought to come as if with the voice of the Christian Church to himself and his brethren. Assembled as we are here, from every district of Scotland, to take part in those affairs which come before us, we may well have on our minds the deep impression of the importance of those great cares which are common to us all. We have great need to have from time to time the routine of our everyday life broken up. We need something to remind us that the sphere of our duties is not confined to our own parishes and congregations. The most earnest and zealous pastor, and the most large-hearted ruling elder in the Church, is subject to the narrowing influences of his daily work. Each city, each division of the country, each little circle of human interests, has something peculiar to itself; every man's difficulties are more or less his own. It is natural, therefore, that by degrees a man of even wide and

widening spirit should have his mind influenced by such facts, and that he should silently fall into the mistake of looking at his own limited field as if it were the world and the centre of all human interests. The man who struggles most against this tendency is the man who first feels how necessary it is for him to be carried outside of his own sphere by reading, by study, by intercourse with others whose experience is different from his own. He goes back from this fresh contact with the world and with his brethren, not less interested in his own duties and cares, but carrying with him a deeper impression of the width of the Church which he serves.

If I may venture to indicate another good result which springs from such gatherings as this, it is the personal advantage which each one of us gains from coming into contact with men who have brought into the general treasury of the Church some gift of their own. If there is a tendency to have one's views and thoughts narrowed by the absorbing character of homework, not less is there a danger in every one's life of measuring himself by himself, and coming to the conclusion that he needs little else than his own natural and acquired stores of thought to perform the work assigned to him. And there is all the greater necessity for us clergy, who are so much bound up in ourselves and in our own capacities, to come into the

presence of the representatives of the whole Church, where all petty feelings of a local sort are kept down, and where we are disposed to listen to the expression of thoughts and opinions at variance with our own. Our intercourse here forces us to measure our individual attainments by a higher standard, and helps us to carry back to our own parishes a larger spirit.

Is there any other way in which we can act on this principle, and find benefit? For example, is it possible for us, not as individuals, but as Churches, to listen to what other Churches in this country, and even in other parts of Christendom, are saying, and to catch any thought which may be applied at home? In the outside world it is a time of international comparisons and contrasts. The old insular narrowness of this country has broken down in secular matters. We are not ashamed in these days to ask how other lands conduct their affairs in education, war, trade, law. We do not necessarily borrow everything we see, but we have found some advantages in watching how civilisation has developed in other countries, how ideas foreign to our own have prevailed, how the forms of liberty have been preserved or crushed; and the inquiry has been useful to our public men. It has helped them to hold with a firmer hand many principles which were becoming loosened; it has taught them to value many old traditions which were beginning to be

regarded as antiquated ; and it has enabled them to see the true basis of many hereditary privileges which some had supposed to have no foundation in reason at all. And in so far, I believe, much evil has been prevented. On the other hand, this inquiry has led us to form a more modest estimate of ourselves, and to confess that, in the race of invention, art, business, we have not outstripped all other peoples, but have been frequently outrun. Is there such a thing as one Church learning from another, one nation from another, one age and century from another, in matters which touch the far more important concerns of religious thought and life ? It is impossible to avoid the conclusion forced on us by observation, that such a result has followed the method of comparative ecclesiastical study. Consequences both good and evil have accompanied the system. We have given and received instruction. Our polity has been imitated in part where it cannot be wholly transferred ; Churches which left nothing for the people to do, and Churches which left hardly anything to anybody except the people, have slowly approximated to our modes of government and discipline, and have found the benefit of such a course. And we ourselves have found, without violating the spirit of our constitution, that we have been able to graft on it some forms which it did not originally possess. And beyond all matters of form, one cannot

shut one's eyes to the fact that over the whole Church of Christ there has been, and ever will be, a leavening, a lending and a borrowing, in all that touches the welfare of Christianity. The Bible does not belong to one section of the Church, but to the whole; and the interpretation of the Bible will, in like manner, become the common property of the whole Church, no matter from whose chair or pulpit it issues. All thought and opinion and speculation are wafted over the world by currents and counter-currents, and every attempt at isolation must prove ineffectual. As Milton said two hundred years ago, you cannot keep out the crows by shutting the garden gate. You cannot interfere with the great law of human sympathy and Christian unity which binds all mankind, and which draws every separate division of Christian faith and practice towards a common centre.

Casting our eyes forward into the future, and endeavouring to represent to ourselves the line in which, as a Church, we should move, have we any mutual counsel to tender, any cheering hopes to exchange? Refusing to be guided either by the mechanical power of traditionalism, or by the restless craving for change, can we, as a Church, find any indication of the course we should follow? Can we cast up an highway for the people of our land, and bid them walk in it? Are we to lead, or are we waiting to be led? Are

we to listen to the vague cry, "Who will show us any good?" and respond to it; or are we to sit still until fresh demands shall be made on us, and until we are forced to answer, not according to our own choice, but the choice of others? I think there can be no doubt about our true position. It becomes the Church to know the day of her visitation. She has often known it, and she has often missed it. She has lost opportunities which cannot return. She has resisted changes which were deemed ruinous, but which really wrought her no harm. She has more than once in her history weakened her influence and her numbers by severity and high-handedness; and if she can in our own day look with open eye on her duty and her privileges, she may do much to prolong and deepen her influence over the minds of coming generations.

The present is a time of transition and restlessness in theological thought. Many are groping in doubt, and asking questions which their fathers were not perplexed with. They are by some called sceptical and unbelieving, but they are not so. They have no pleasure in unbelief, and as little in doubt. They do not want to lose what our common faith professes to give. They do not want to lose the quieting power of divine love and forgiveness and fellowship with God. They have no pleasure in thinking dubiously

of the Cross, and of the great central facts of that Divine Life from which we draw inspiration. But they point to Church history, and show how in each age the pulpit had a voice of its own for its own time; and they wish for a distinct and edifying voice to suit their longings and desires. They point to our own lifetime, and they tell us that within their own experience the whole method and style of preaching have undergone change. Some truths are urged in our day which thirty or forty years ago were not denied, but were less felt to be vital; and you very seldom hear, as you did when the present generation was young, the same subjects discussed which occupied whole volumes then. We are expected to meet the special wants of the day. I do not say they are deeper wants, or wants of a more intelligent origin, or indicative of greater culture or thought. That is not the question. The point lies in this—Are they distinctive? do they arise from the history of the time, from the discoveries, the scholarship, the exigencies of life in our own day? And if they do—if men, owing to prevalent habits of thought and criticism, are forced into new lines of vision, be they higher or lower—it is surely the work of the Church and of her ministers to present the great essentials of Christian truth to the people in such wise as to commend the facts and doctrines of Scripture to their

understandings and consciences. We cannot suppose it possible for the Gospel of Christ to become unnecessary, or to be superseded by science, invention, art, or anything else. There are great wants and cravings in the human heart which will not be satisfied by any facts in nature. The soul thirsts, and thirsts again, after drinking of the deepest wells; and it will always fall to those whose labours are in the Gospel ministry to meet these wants and cravings with that which, brought from the still deeper springs of everlasting life, has met and satisfied their own. But the great facts and doctrines of Christianity are not, as I have said, always presented in the same form. Every new aspect of doubt or disbelief demands a new method. You cannot refer young men who come to you for direction in these modern problems of theology, to books which you read and studied at college or in your own early ministry. There are volumes, indeed, which may be said to be immortal, and will never go out of use; but there are others which have served their generations, and are laid aside; and you must be prepared to afford guidance and help to the opening and perplexed intellect in these days with fresh materials and fresh methods of thought. You want to preserve in the hearts of men faith, reverence, the deep sense of the divine presence of God, undiminished loyalty and devotion to the person of Jesus

Christ. You want to sustain the high hope of the future, the assurance of eternal righteousness and eternal love, and you must be ready to give an answer to their eager inquiries how the mist which gathers about them and their faith is to be dispersed. Have you no other answer than the old one? have you no solution to their difficulties—historical, critical, speculative—except to say that it is the duty of everybody to treat such difficulties as temptations and sins? Others come to you as a Church, and as the representatives of the wisdom and power of the Church; they bring with them their perplexities suggested by nature—the earth, the world of life and growth, the universe in which we are as a speck—and they lay these perplexities before you, not to puzzle you, but in the hope that you may be able to lead their minds out into the free atmosphere of faith in the spiritual world; and what are you to do? Even if nobody puts these questions, the questions are put: you put them to yourselves. They are scattered broadcast over literature; and is the one and only reply to be a misapplication of Scripture, and a labelling them with the title of “opposition of science falsely so called”? It is our privilege, no less than our highest duty, to present the truth as it has gained our own acceptance, in such a way as to disarm prejudice, and make men feel that the Gospel is a power

which wins the understanding as well as the affections.

Looking to our future, then, as a Church, it behoves us to see what can be done to preserve the faith, the hope, the character of the people, and especially to meet the wants and necessities, spiritual and intellectual, which spring up in the progress of national life. Consider how much has been done already, without destroying one stone of the foundations. The Church has met the desire for the improvement of that portion of our service which consists of prayer and praise. The Church has shown its appreciation of tolerance and large-heartedness, without ceasing to be watchful and true to herself; and with what results? May I not affirm that there has been a growing attachment throughout the kingdom to our national Church—an increasing confidence in her, a deeper tenderness of feeling towards her, as if it were too solemn a thing to contemplate her removal? I do not advocate a system of courting temporary popularity at the expense of truth, or purity, or spiritual-mindedness. That were no gain. But it seems to me as if, within her wide and earnest embrace, the Church could gain men who would otherwise be left outside of all Christian influences, and as if she might by the same sweet influences retain others who are halting and hesitating. It is our part, like a

tender shepherd, to make all men feel that the inside of the fold is better than the desert, and that the pastures are richer by the stream than on the mountains. There is room in the Father's heart for elder and younger brothers, there is room in the great heart of God for men who do not make room for each other, and there ought to be room in God's house on earth for those who can only look on one another with a doubtful spirit.

It is not the boast of the Church of Scotland how many she may retain, still less how many she may cast away. In the net which she casts, there will be found good and bad; but it is not her object to anticipate the time of judgment. Let us meet the wants of the people; let us help and guide the ever advancing flow of life and thought, drawing men to the Gospel of Christ in the spirit and after the example of her great Head, whom the multitude delighted to hear, because He spoke to their hearts with the authority of One who knew what was in man.

*Concluding Address as Moderator of the
General Assembly of the Church
of Scotland.*

May 31, 1880.

RIGHT REVEREND AND RIGHT HONOURABLE,

IT falls to me to bring this Assembly formally to a close ; but before I do so, I accept the time-honoured privilege accorded to the occupant of this chair, of giving expression in some parting words to thoughts and feelings held in common by us all. And if, in what I am to utter, I shall receive the same indulgence which has been extended to me since I was called to this honourable position by your kindness at the opening of the Assembly, I shall regard the time and the occasion as a cause of thankfulness. The appointment to this office in the presence of my brethren came to me in the usual form, and took me by surprise. But though I was conscious how many things were lacking to the worthy discharge of its manifold functions, I obeyed the call to honour when

the voice of authority pronounced it. And I have learned in this place how the Church is prepared to deal kindly with her sons in any post of duty or honour to which she invites them. I ask you to accept my cordial thanks for your generous support, and to interpret my conduct here with charity.

It is natural that when we are assembled, we, who are the appointed ministers of the Church, should avail ourselves of the opportunity to animate one another, and to help our brethren and ourselves to return to our parishes with fresh interest and life.

I take advantage of the occasion to speak in your name as much as in my own—in your name rather than in my own, except where the matter is doubtful or weak—and I wish to avoid the very appearance of assumption in any words or suggestions which I have to offer. The opportunity of speaking from this place and to the Church comes to few, and it comes only once in a lifetime; and it seems to me to be one of the great duties of the office to endeavour to act as the interpreter and mouthpiece of the Church for the time being, and to gather up some thoughts and reflections which are floating through the minds of all, and which claim expression in the way both of sympathy and of authority.

Let me at the outset, and without entering on

questions of debate in the province of ecclesiastical order or privilege, recall to our minds the position of the Christian ministry, on which so much of the welfare of the Church depends. One of the greatest advantages of a regular ministry is the existence of a class of men who are always expected in their public teaching to speak of what is deepest and truest in human life. This is their highest honour and privilege. There are times, indeed, when all men can use the social and friendly offices of life for this end; but these times are exceptional and rare, and a man is never sure when his words will be regarded with welcome or reach open hearts. Each profession has doubtless advantages of its own which it may employ to good and worthy ends; but it seems to me that in the offices and services of the Christian ministry there is a way of access to the most sacred chamber of the human soul, and the ministers of religion are not only entitled, but expected to make use of it. Provision is thus made, under the authority and influence of the Christian faith, and recognised by the customs of society, for dealing honestly and truly with mankind. A minister is never thought out of place in speaking directly to the human conscience. He, of all men, has this position assigned to him. Other men from the press, and from platform, and from the floor of the senate,

may deal with the great facts of human nature in their most serious aspects; but it is only a few of these who can press home the truths which fill their own minds, only a few who can arouse the national conscience and force the world to think: and even if there were more, the world is not always in a mood to listen, and it will frequently resent the attempt on the part of writers or senators to assume the office of spiritual monitor and counsellor. But a Christian minister, in the discharge of his vocation, is never reckoned obtrusive or presumptuous, when he confronts his hearers with the eternal verities of human nature, and with its obligations, its necessities, its aspirations, its hopes. The minister, in addressing his fellow-men, is not expected to be witty, or eccentric, or smart, still less to be violent and fierce; but he is expected to be true, thoughtful, earnest, and grave. If he has not attempted to turn men's thoughts in upon themselves, and upwards to Him from whom all thought comes, or forward to the issues of human work and action, he has for the time being missed the object of the ministry. It is a glorious advantage, if we will but think of it, that without doing violence to the courtesies of life, a minister has the opportunity every week to touch on what is most sacred and delicate in the intercourse of life, and without the appearance of being priestly

or assuming, to place the human in contact with the divine, and cause men to keep before their own spirits the everlasting realities by which they are overshadowed.

We have been so accustomed to this advantage, that we have almost lost sight of its value. Yet the importance of it can hardly be overrated. And it is well, amid the commonplaces of our duties and our parish work, to reflect on the fact that the humblest of us can, without even the appearance of ill-timedness, hold before the minds of men the deepest truths in human life, the relation of man to God and to the unseen, the realities of sin, redemption, forgiveness, righteousness, and the eternal laws of God. Apart from the question whether this work is performed well and with power, it is for the community a matter of supreme importance that there should exist a class of men whose function it is to bear witness for those truths which lie nearest the conscience and the spiritual life. Such men may discharge their task perfunctorily, *but they are there*, and it is natural to suppose that a fair proportion of them will enter into the spirit of their calling, and prove faithful witnesses to the truth. Such men are in the best sense of the word God's prophets, ambassadors of Him who came from God to bear witness to the truth. One hears much in these days about

the decline of the influence of the pulpit. It becomes us to listen carefully to the charge, to ask its meaning, and to see how far it is relevant and true. We can have no interest in anything else. Now, as long as men are permitted to speak the truth with the freedom which comes of earnestness and deep conviction, the influence of the pulpit cannot in itself decline. If religion were merely something outward, if the truths and sanctions of religion were mere adhesives, affixed to human nature, which could be expunged without injuring the substance and life of the human heart, then the influence of the pulpit might decay and vanish like any branch of industry, or like any special form of art which depends on the caprices of the age or on the tastes of mankind. But religion, as we believe, is as needful to man, and as really adapted to his nature, as light is to the eye or the atmosphere to the lungs; and unless the soul of man shall cease to bear on it any marks of the source from which it came, and until it shall cease to have on it the image and superscription of the great King, the influence of the pulpit must assert its power, if it be wisely and faithfully employed. Only let us be content with the *legitimate* influence of the pulpit, and we shall never despond about it. Only let us hold fast to the conviction that it is a spiritual force, and not carnal—that its grand design is to bring men

back to God, and to operate on what is best and purest in human life, and the decline of the influence of the pulpit is a phrase which will cease to have any meaning. If by saying that the influence of the pulpit has fallen off, it is meant that men no longer resort to church and to the clergy to learn what course of politics they are to pursue, and if it is supposed that because nobody in our time consults the oracle as to how laws should be framed and State affairs managed, then I grant that the influence of the pulpit has been shifted; but only *shifted*, not diminished. It is true that the king's ambassador is no longer chosen from the clergy; and the chancellor, who holds the king's seal, and in common language holds the king's conscience, is no longer a priest: but the influence of the priest in diplomacy, in statecraft, in the region of policy, was an accident, perhaps an excrescence or false growth, and never sprang from the true root of clerical power, and the loss of such influence is no real loss; rather does it, like the lopping off of a superfluous branch, force the sap into the strong and fruit-bearing boughs. Let us not confound names with things. The office of the preacher survives; his liberty is preserved to use argument, to wield the tremendous forces of experience, faith, truth, the testimony of God, and to direct them against all opposing power; and as long as a man has faith in his

message, and faith in Him in whose name he comes, he may rest assured that his influence will never lose its value. All the changes of national customs, the growth of other powers such as science, literature, permanent and periodical, are not destructive of the pulpit: the minister's function is untouched in substance, though modified in form; its place is rather exalted and its character purified. And he still retains the privilege of being the man who may always venture into the holy region of conscience with the tacit consent of all men, and who may in his place, and in the spirit of meekness and wisdom, find constant access to the human soul. Only let us use the powers we really have, and which are given us in virtue of the office we fill—only let us use these powers thoughtfully, wisely, and with due regard to our spiritual work—and we shall never be deprived of any influence which is worth the name.

It is one of the most distinctive and honourable privileges of a minister of the Church of Scotland that, in his sacred office, and even in matters which are only social and neighbourly, he is at the call of everybody. In many of our poorer districts the humbler class of parishioners resort to him for counsel in matters which could be as well attended to by any civil functionary; but the poor go to him not as an official, but as a friend. They trust him, and in their

anxieties and troubles they take his advice and are guided by his counsel. Not one, perhaps, in twenty of the applications to which he is subjected, concern those questions which he is specially appointed to teach and inculcate. With the minister of Christ it is as true as with Christ Himself, that men bring their tales of sickness, of poverty, of care, and lay them at his feet, and appeal for his aid. But it is surely no ground of complaint if it is with the servant as it was with the Master. And this confidence in the minister as a friend whose services are not bought but claimed and used, whilst it entails much worry and vexation, is in reality a mighty testimony to the value of the ministry, and to the thoughts which have grown up around it during the past generations. It is a newer and better form of the privilege and sanctity accorded from time immemorial to sacred places and sacred orders. The Christian ministry, as it has grown up through long years, is in our day and amongst ourselves a symbol of what is best and most unselfish in the Christian religion. And whether we individually express this sentiment aright or not, there are thousands who so interpret and understand it, and who claim us as their own. We fret at the number of interruptions, and interruptions of a petty sort, to which we are subjected, but it is only to us they are petty. To those who come to us

it is otherwise, and I know not any higher honour than to be treated as a part of the great system of the world. It is a virtual honour done to us when the poor resort to our presence for friendly aid and sympathy. They do not think of the trouble they give; and why should they, if they look on us as religious friends and counsellors, as really fathers in God, to whom the wants of God's creatures are supposed to be always interesting and dear? What child or pupil ever thought himself an intruder? I think one ought to rejoice that people in difficulty come to us as naturally as they carry their pitcher to the spring, and think as little of it as of the boon which they owe to nature, or as when they open their casement for sun and air, and regard it as one great purpose, and the chief purpose, for which sun and air were created. Let us be content to be employed as God's agents. "Ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" is our motto; and if we can in any measure represent Him who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, we have reached the furthest limit of usefulness in the service of God. The least is the greatest, the man who is most the servant of others is as the Lord of all.

In view of the work which falls to the clergy of our Church, I maintain that there is the fullest

demand on the best energies of the best men who can be found. In all shapes, ability, character, faith, patience, are called into requisition if a man will do his work honourably and with a good conscience. And in our Presbyterian Church there are hardly any other influences to bring these qualities into play ; for though the Presbytery is, in theory, the bishop of our clergy, and takes a supervision of their work, that theory can hardly, in practice, be carried out except in cases which call for severest discipline. The clergy are thrown practically upon their honour, and to all intents and purposes are responsible only to God and to their own hearts for the right use of their gifts and powers. In all parishes there is need of a quiet, laborious expenditure of thought and time in our profession. There are many minds ever ready to receive the most carefully digested truths ; there are, even in the most unpromising spheres, some to whom the freshness of spiritual life, as exhibited in the preacher's words, is always welcome. I am convinced that it is unsafe, as well as unwise and wrong, to count on an absolutely undiscerning audience anywhere ; and it is presuming on a degree of ignorance, which nowhere exists, to suppose that a minister can address his parishioners from Sunday to Sunday without thoughtful consideration of what he has to say, and not be detected by more

than one or two as a shallow pretender to the teacher's powers. The humblest parishioner, and the one least trained to criticism, often probes by a kind of prophetic instinct the swollen bag of wind ; and I have known persons who got no credit for insight into the merits of sermons at all, perfectly conscious when they were treated well or ill, and perfectly aware whether there was any truth in what was uttered fitted to afford sustenance and light to the human spirit. They cannot analyse their own consciousness, and they may often make mistakes, but they arrive at wonderfully correct results in judging whether the minister had thought it worth his while to present anything to their understandings and hearts fit for the occasion and time.

Deeper than the taste and emotions of the people, however, is the spiritual state of the parish, and the constant need of maintaining that at as high a level as possible, and raising it where it is low. The preacher's influence, it is true, is in these days only one influence out of many, yet it is always there and always appreciable, and his main task is a slow prolonged contest with every evil power and principle. It is his duty to try to meet all opposing forces to the kingdom of truth, and to put them down by word and by living example.

When a zealous and earnest man looks at the nature of such a battle as must be fought between the kingdoms of Good and Evil, I do not wonder that he should fret at the conditions under which he must engage in it. I do not wonder that he is impatient at the slow movement of the fortune of the day. And I can understand how he should long for more vigorous measures against the common enemy, and should welcome any more ready and rapid methods of gaining his object. I can, in such circumstances, understand how some men of earnest minds, and void of all fanaticism, should look with hope to special outbursts of religious fervour, and should anticipate from them results which otherwise it might take years to accomplish, if they are accomplished at all. And I could accept thankfully any plans which should, after the fashion of modern warfare, destroy in a day the evil forces of the world. But in the spiritual kingdom all analogies drawn from ordinary warfare fail. When the battle to be fought is with coarseness, intemperance, impurity, avarice, pride, selfishness, ignorance, you cannot by any violent efforts undermine and destroy them. Sin in all its forms is a disease, *but it is not an epidemic*, and you cannot treat it as you treat some plague which is new to the climate, or which springs out of defective sanitary arrangements. I have

often seen, when a plague was approaching, that violent and drastic measures were adopted with success; much good was done at the time, and good which survived the time: and so, I daresay, some abnormal forms of evil have been checked by vigorous and unusual efforts; but all the while the minister comes to learn that sin is more than an epidemic, that its roots do not lie in climate and in class, in material circumstances or in race and blood, but in human nature, and far down in human life; and just as our registrars tell us how year by year the number of deaths from the commonest forms of disease far exceed all the losses occasioned by the most terrible outbreak of temporary plagues, so year by year the victims of sin, in its commonest forms, far outnumber those who are overcome by special types of evil. They fall, not in thick ranks, but in single line and at irregular intervals, and their recovery is not by battalions and by companies, but by the slow and personal conquest of individual minds. It is this uneventful character of the minister's work which tries the heart and patience of an earnest man, and tests his faith in the inward and spiritual power of the truth.

In connection with what has just been said as to the spirit in which our task is to be performed, I may remark that every one of us whose daily and life work

is the ministry of the Word, is tempted to cry out for some sign that his work is genuine and useful. In these days of upheaval, when the old foundations are shaken as by an earthquake, and when tremor seizes on the heart as to whether anything shall be left at all as the basis of a spiritual life towards God and man, one catches at shadows, and longs for some special sign in heaven or on earth that all religion and revelation and hope and faith are not a mere illusion. "Show us a sign," we cry; and the cry is caught and repeated, "If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." We seek proofs of the presence of God's spirit *outside* of the region of spiritual working and spiritual life. Now it is well for us at once to look at this craving, and see what it means. It does not mean a devouter inquiry. We are not more religious, but less religious, when we seek a sign from God; and we are not more but less religious when we specify the test, and bring forth our wool and our fleece like Gideon, or set up our sun-dial like Ahaz, and demand that we shall be satisfied with some crucial test. You want a proof of the Spirit of God in your ministry, in your teaching, in your church, in your Bible. You demand a sign, it may be in the hushed audience, in the sympathetic thrill of reverence or awe, or some other symptom of emotion. You are satisfied that, where these are found, God is with

you and in you of a truth. Others, again, among us, when we are asked for a sign that we are true prophets of the Unseen, and have a message from the invisible world to the soul and life of man, are fain to reply by returns of numbers, by statements of religious activity, by tabulated forms of work and generosity and sacrifice,—and we answer, *these* are our proofs. But without for one moment depreciating any single form of religious effort or energy, let me, with all the earnestness I can employ, caution especially my younger brethren against a spirit as old as any religious history and experiences which we possess. “Who shall go up to the heaven, who shall go down into the deep?” is the old question; but the sign is not in heaven nor in the sea, but it is here, within every human bosom, within the range of every human life—it is inside, and not outside, of the region of spiritual thought and reflection, and it is to be found, not in what is palpable or in what can be written down, but in what comes under the cognisance of one’s own conscience and spirit.

In the great work to which we are called, we recognise outside influences of various kinds. While enjoying in this House, and in all our Church Courts, our freedom and independence to discuss

such subjects as we please and in our own way, we cannot be insensible to the influences from without which, more or less, affect our deliberations and opinions. It is very seldom indeed that any society or Church takes the initiative in introducing changes into its own constitution or established order. In secular and sacred corporations alike, one finds that those in charge of their affairs are slow to recognise the necessity for improvement or modification. Forms and customs which arose out of an inward pressure or want, live on after the circumstances in which they arose have ceased to prevail; and the Church or civil society is only reminded of the growth of a new order by seeing old arrangements and old customs lose their force and fall into abeyance. In such cases some earnest men who have attached a sacredness to the form, regard with alarm the decay of what they always associated with religion itself; and they cherish a fear that religion in its essence is losing the hold it used to have on the popular mind. But the fear may be mistaken, and the changes which are growing up in the human heart and in human society may be misinterpreted.

It would, I think, be wrong to say that we are in these days less religious than when a cross was erected on every eminence, or when every day was marked as a saint's day, or when pilgrimages were

made to every martyr's tomb, or when holy places attracted visitors, or when convents and monasteries sheltered hundreds and thousands of men and women consecrated to a religious life. The form of piety has changed, but most of us would perhaps say, changed for the better. And to come later down, it will hardly be affirmed that our religion is less healthy or less pure than in the days when, from all surrounding parishes, crowds were gathered to celebrate the Communion, and to attend the services of religion in church or in the open air for many hours on end ; and possibly our descendants and successors may challenge for themselves a religion no less deep and true than our own, when many observances at present held sacred have passed out of use. Let us distinguish : let us not rush at once to the conclusion that the bond between the human and the divine is broken, because the old cords are unused ; let us not imagine that men have ceased to be devout and godly because there have vanished certain aspects of devotion and outward godliness. The Church has listened, and wisely marked the signs of the times, and she has long ceased, as in various instances that might be adduced, to treat deviation from ancient custom as sins to be censured. She has separated the substance from the shadow, and the temple is still holy though the scaffolding has been lowered or taken away.

No one feels more deeply than I do the necessity of guarding the purity and value of the Holy Scriptures, but I think that in this region too the Church has learned, that by applying to these ancient and sacred oracles of faith the instruments of learning and science, the value of our Scriptures is not impaired. Both science and theology may have come too hastily to conclusions in regard to their mutual relationships, and both may be constrained to adjust the frontier. Some of us are old enough to remember the effects produced by the discoveries of geology, and the disquieting fears lest the Bible was to be robbed of something infinitely precious, because theologians felt themselves driven to re-peruse and re-expound its opening chapters. It was the old problem which the Church was forced to consider, on the transition from the Ptolemaic to the Copernican systems. Men had confounded the letter with the spirit; they had suffered traditional ideas to grow up, and had read much into their Bibles which was not there; and when science began to weed out these later ideas, those who had fondly cherished them were dismayed, forgetting our Lord's words—"Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." But if the theologian was timid and dogmatic, no less dogmatic and forward was the liberal man of science, though neither the one nor the

other could stay the progress of events. And as years rolled on, science and theology followed their own course; and once more new forces in literature and science have sprung into existence, and again they have aroused alarm and suspicion.

The border-land of philosophy and religion is the scene of mutual foray and debate. Criticism and history, no less than philosophy, have pushed their territory forward, and have claimed to sink their shafts, and to apply their plummet and measuring-line on ground which used to be deemed too sacred for such methods. Science and history and criticism turn over the sacred leaves of our holy books, look at the water-mark, examine the forms of words, test names, detect in turns of thought the vestiges of old controversies, and treat everything sacred as if it were a doubtful witness, to be cross-questioned on every point. These modern inquirers come into our temples without uncovering, and from roof to pavement they leave nothing unsearched. What are we to do? Are we to fret and quake at their conduct? Are we to lock up our treasures, and refuse to submit them to scrutiny? Or, on the other hand, are we to be charged with indifference to the truth, because we recognise the power of modern inventions for discovering truth? Nay, I venture to assert that in the minds of those who receive such visitors and

welcome their investigations, there is often a reverence, profound, intelligent, and broad; and I believe that the sacred Word finds such men and gains their confidence, as truly as it touches the heart and conscience of the most uninquiring and indiscriminating worshipper. That there are men blind to the merits of Scripture, who see in it nothing but the worn-out vestments of Hebrew and Alexandrian fabrics, I do not deny; but I believe that others see in them garments for glory and for beauty. Probably some of those who have heated the furnace seven times hotter than it was ever heated before, have supposed that they had consumed much wood and hay and stubble in the great building; but I am sure that the gold and silver and precious stones of the Christian temple have come out pure, and the smell of fire has not passed on them.

We have need, perhaps, of these outside influences. They seem at times to us to be foreign and intrusive, but in the best sense of the word they are auxiliary, and we cannot do without them. It has always been necessary for the Church to avail itself of forces outside the Church. The great leader of Israel, who had the promise of the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, threw no disparagement upon the divine guide when he said to Hobab, "Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou

knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes:" and by not one whit do we dishonour that spirit which leads into all truth, though we say to men of wide acquaintance with human learning and research, "Leave us not, ye may be to us instead of eyes." By their help we are better equipped, and in turn we can say to them, "Come with us, and we will do you good."

And if we recognise the outside influences of the time, much more may we recognise those influences which bind us to kindred communities engaged in spiritual work. The relation of the Church of Scotland to other Churches is one of practical interest and importance. It cannot be left out of account, even if we were narrow enough to limit our thoughts exclusively to our own affairs. Irrespective of all theories about union, there is a unity, not of our making or choosing, but a unity which is independent of us and of our actings, as it is independent of the actings of others. There is what I may venture to call an unconscious unity between all Churches—not one which is chosen or accepted, but which is forced on all sections of the Christian Church by their very nature, whether they will or no, and from which they cannot shake themselves free. This union is not a union of concerted policy, nor even of consent, but it is a

function of the organic life which belongs to every society, founded for spiritual ends. In virtue of our existing for the purpose of teaching and diffusing religious truth, we come under those general laws which control all sections of the Church, and, without any direct intention, we influence and are influenced by others. This mutual relation of Churches is not an ideal or sentimental thing. It is one of reality, and its results are seen in practice every day. We can no more shut ourselves in as a Church than we can mark out and inclose the atmosphere which encompasses us, and seclude it from the atmospheric influences all round the earth. All seas and oceans are in reality one body of water, the names we assign to them are only verbal distinctions, and the great forces of nature remind us that geographical names only express our own limited vision and experience. The tidal wave travels its appointed course, and visits every creek and bay. So it is with the Church of Christ. The distinctive names and forms are really less a matter of practical moment than what men call the *ideal* unity. The great currents of human thought, and the great surface-swell of feeling and emotion, rise where they may, do in effect pervade not one Church, but all Churches.

The modes of thought, the speculations, the tendencies of opinion and action which are first seen and

felt in one Church or one country, do not end where they began. And just as modern science has discovered that atmospheric disturbances are capable of registration, and that their course can be signalled half-way across the earth, because the invisible atmosphere is one unbroken globe of air, so not less real is the compactness of the Church in Christendom,—at least, in those portions of it where one can read the signals. The movements which affect one region are sure to visit other regions. The world of thought and faith and devotion is really one, and every new element of doubt, or restlessness, or inquiry diffuses itself everywhere. It may take its rise in Germany or Holland, in Britain or America, but it will soon be seen and felt far and wide. The new spirit is not in Catholicism or Protestantism, not in Presbyterianism of one school or another; it is in the air—it is in the time,—and be it good or bad, hopeful or depressing, it forces its way, no more hindered by the artificial barriers, boundaries, and ecclesiastical partitions, than the Gulf-stream is impeded by the small islets in its course. The great laws of human thought are too strong for sectarianism. Church stands apart from Church, and school from school, right from left; and each thanks God it stands alone—that it is not ritualistic, or not rational, or not fanatical—that it is not manacled by forms, or

lawless without forms ; each Church, and each school of the Church, raises its own banner, and imagines itself a unity, an organism detached and complete, subject to no authority outside of itself, and least of all, liable to the weaknesses or failings, in doctrine or practice, which it has detected in others : but suddenly, and when it is not aware of it, the new spirit rises up where it was least expected, and that which has long been secretly and silently working beneath, appears to the eye. The unity which is called theoretical or ideal, is now seen to be practical and real. There is a unity in the Church which is far deeper than any which can be framed by creeds or conferences, by articles of agreement written on parchment. There is a unity where it is not admitted, compelling us to listen to what is spoken and done in other Churches, and withholding us from uttering the word of derision or indifference when some trouble arises. It looks like a dream of our earlier ministry to read debates in other communities long since closed in our own ; and when we hear of controversies and discussions of a far more serious nature, we may well give our sympathy, and learn for ourselves a lesson of wisdom, tolerance, and patience, which may be needed at home.

No single Church can boast of absolute purity and unanimity, in the sense of being free from internal

divisions. The creeds of some Churches may seem more definite than others, but substantial oneness of spirit is not the mechanical result of narrowness, any more than liberty is the necessary outcome of vagueness. It is in Churches as in the growth of constitutions in States. Change and modification of opinions slowly affect, not the constitution itself, but the administration of it; and the generous spirit in which our Church watches the silent flow of thought, does more to regulate and control it, than if she were to mark amiss every hasty or unguarded word which is written and spoken.

After all, we are in dimensions and numbers but a small and almost inappreciable portion of the great Church of Jesus Christ on earth. And though to us it is the ecclesiastical world in which our dearest interests are treasured up, yet the whole spiritual wealth of that divine kingdom is not stored there. It may serve to flatter ourselves if we speak and act as though we were the centre, if not almost the whole orb, of religious light and knowledge to mankind; but I know nothing more depressing than to cherish the supposition that all outside of us is darkness and error. That certainly is not the sentiment of the Church of Scotland. We are thankful for whatever good is done by the Churches

around us in this land, national or unestablished: we are thankful for the Churches of the Reformation in Europe, and for their branches in the American continent, which have a vast indefinite future before them. Yes, and we are thankful for every witness to the living Head of the Church in every Christian land, and in every spot sacred to His name. We may blush for what we believe to be schism and error, extravagance and superstition, and we long to see the broad streams of Eastern and Western Christianity sweetened and purified; but with all our earnest protest against the corruption of Christianity, we do not overlook the fact that all these rivers took their rise in one pure fountain-head, and that they all contain a living element fitted to refresh the souls of men. Nay, as we look into Christian life as it is lived by many a thoughtful student, and by tens of thousands of unlettered peasants, who have never learned to know us and to love us or our Church, we shall acknowledge that though blindness in part has happened to great sections of the Church, yet they are not cast off.

I speak not of systems, nor of the method in which these systems have been worked, but rather of the Christian life and power which even these systems have not been able to crush out. We have been too familiar with persecution and hard usage in our own

past history to believe in its efficacy. We have suffered too much from narrowness, intolerance, and uncharitableness, to resort to such agencies ourselves. We have been excommunicated by other Churches, disowned, treated as devoid of all claim to authority in religious teaching and truth; but that has not cut us off from the body of Christ, and neither can we by such acts of violence lop off a single branch or twig from the parent tree. Looking, then, at the immense dominion of Christianity, and at its widespread influences, we cannot help having a sense of insignificance as we come back to our own little stripe of Church territory; we are apt to lose heart as we compare the thin line with the broad mass, and to say that one such Church as our own would hardly be missed from the map of Christendom.

But size and outward greatness are not the measure of moral and spiritual influence, any more than of intellectual power. Palestine and Greece are mere specks on the surface of the earth, but the religion of the one and the philosophy of the other have exercised a power over the human mind which shall never decay; and it is no exaggeration to say that small sections of the Christian Church have stirred up enthusiasm and faith in the hearts of men, more than larger Churches. In the secluded fast-

nesses of the Alps, in the swamps of the Netherlands, in the Western isles of Scotland in former days, small portions of territory stand out in the great map of Church history as centres of attraction to which all turn. Like points of light in the firmament, they shine forth, and proclaim the truth that the influence of a Church in the kingdom of God is determined, not by its size or grandeur, not by the multitude of its followers, but by the intensity of its faith, by the holiness of its life, by the purity of its zeal, and by the patience with which it bears itself in trial or adversity—in short, by the fulfilment of its divine ends under its supreme and living Lord.

But small as it is, the Church is ours. Whilst we have ten thousand instructors ranging over centuries, and sending forth their voices from all lands, yet have we not many fathers. And whilst it is well for us to lay aside conceit, and pride, and boasting, as if we were the one source of spiritual life and piety and truth, it is also well for us to survey our own little homestead, sacred to us by a past history which we cannot surrender, and dear to us by associations which can never fail to bind us to it in affection and attachment.

I have spoken of ourselves, and of our duties at home and in the face of our own countrymen, who can

see our labours, and in part judge us. But I would not forget at this moment that there are in the far outlying posts of duty missionaries and chaplains in the service of the Church, keeping lonely watch, seldom relieved by change of sentry, and yearning for signs and words of recognition on our part. A few words, deeply felt and earnestly spoken, meet the wants of our brethren, who are apt to be forgotten by the Church at large, and remembered only by the few whose official duties bring them into connection with the work abroad. These loyal and brave men have not accepted distant work because they failed to find work nearer home. Within the last year or two, some of your most promising students and probationers have obeyed the call of the Church, and have nobly offered themselves for duty; and others, who have long borne the burden and heat of the day, continue at their labour. It is well that the Church, as she rejoices in the presence of so many loyal children at home, should, like a family at its festive gatherings, think of the absent sons, and mention their names with double honour and affection. The sailor boy, the soldier in the tropics, the surgeon in the hospital, the enterprising lad pushing his way in the colonies or in the jungle, is sorely missed by parent and brother and sister, but his image is on every heart, and his absence endears him, and makes

the thought of him more tender. So would I at a time like this, and in the presence of the Church, desire to think of those who, in remote lands, in cities and villages, in schools and colleges, are serving their Church, with few, sometimes none, to share their feelings or to understand them.

In your name I bid them God-speed, and in your name I assure them that their names and faces and works are often present with us, and that we are not unmindful of their identity with ourselves in everything that is worthy of respect and admiration. Such good wishes and such greetings may pass for little amongst ourselves, may even seem an idle ceremony; but meagre and commonplace as they appear, they gather body and fragrance by a journey of thousands of miles, and they are read in bungalow and tent with an interest which inspires hope and courage.

I regard it as one of the most fortunate circumstances in connection with the mission-work of the Church, whether at home or abroad, that every department of it is under the direct and immediate supervision of the Church itself. There are no missionary societies in the Church. The Church itself is in its corporate capacity the true missionary society, and the Church as a Church retains in her own hands the entire control over the policy and administration

of every missionary enterprise. She is identified in principle and in detail with every organisation which exists for sending the Gospel to other lands, and for diffusing the means of religious ordinances by churches and mission-stations at home. One or two apparent exceptions have sprung up within the last few years in regard to supplementary aid to poorly endowed livings, and towards the erection and endowment of new churches. But these agencies all work on the lines of the General Assembly's plans, and in harmony with them. One apparent exception too, in practice at least, in the field of evangelisation abroad, was seen in the efforts made on behalf of the women in India; but the constitution of this Association has within the present year been remodelled: it has been brought into closer union with the Church in its corporate capacity; and it is now in every respect as much under the control of the Assembly in its machinery, policy, and methods of working, as any of the ordinary "schemes" of the Church. How great the advantage of such a system of conducting the missionary work of the Church is, we can hardly estimate, for we have from the beginning of the missionary enterprise acted on it. But we can hardly fail to see that such a method has contributed to hold together the various elements in a National Church which are apt to fly asunder and to create

little orbits of their own. Divergent modes of thought, and contending ideas of Church polity, inevitably grow up in a Church like ours where there is freedom both in thought and action. Now it is of inexpressible advantage that those great works of religious life which the Church as a National Church engages in should not be identified with any single party of ecclesiastical politics, or any one school of ecclesiastical opinion. It is of advantage not only to the schemes themselves, but still more to the Church and all her sons, that each minister and member of it should feel himself responsible for a work which soars above all the little currents and shiftings of the lower atmosphere. It has sometimes been said that our National Churches are like staves, which are only kept from falling to pieces by State bands, and that, if these were loosened, all unity of organisation would disappear, and we should have several Churches instead of one. Possibly there is truth in the assertion, but not the whole truth: and speaking for ourselves, I may, I think, declare that the strong forces of religious life—far stronger in their operation than legal bands, and more akin in their nature to the subtler properties of gravitation—have preserved the various sections of the Church in mutual cohesion. And not less real than the advantage to the Church and its various schemes is another

advantage, undesigned and indirect though it be. In private and home life the affections and sympathies of even the closest relationships lose their nerve and vigour if they have no external object of interest. No human relationship can be preserved in a healthy tone unless it has some duty, or care, or study, or other interest which may become a common rallying and meeting point. And no Church can live on mutual salutations and mutual expressions of good will; some great and good objects must exist, in which all sides and sections of the Church can co-operate, and in which they may all find vigorous exercise for their talents and sympathies.

I shall not attempt even the briefest review of the work to which this Assembly has devoted its sittings. It may be enough to bespeak, on behalf of those enterprises in which the Church is engaged, the sympathies and efforts of the ministers and elders who are returning to their parishes, and who carry away with them an impression of the variety and extent to which this Supreme Court is pledged in the service and cause of Christ. So varied and so extensive indeed is the work, both at home and in foreign countries, that no single office-bearer of the Church is to be blamed if he fails to show the same measure of interest in all the schemes or operations of Christian

philanthropy and Christian thought. Every individual has his special tendencies formed by early association and training, or by natural aptitude for business or study; and there is scarcely a branch of Christian science, or labour, or contemplation, which has not found expression for itself in the round of Church life, and which may not naturally attract some minds. I do not suppose that there are almost any members of the Assembly or of the Church of Scotland who can heartily share in every department of the work falling on the Church. But each may find something wherein he can specially be helpful. Let each contribute according to his ability of the gifts God has bestowed on him, and let all in other sections of Christian duty cherish sympathy with those who are set in places of trust and responsibility, and do what lies in their power to make the work of the Church as practical and widespread as they can. There is not a member of this Assembly, clerical or lay, who may not travel in sympathy and labour beyond the narrow boundaries of his own parish, and share somewhat in the wider activities of Christian thought and care which pertain to the Church as a whole. This result is indeed one of the great ends to be gained by our annual meetings, where one sees and feels so powerfully that that which concerns the kingdom of God is not limited by the bound-

aries of our individual work. Nothing human is really foreign to us, nothing Christian is really outside of our tasks as Christian elders and ministers; and though it is physically and mentally impossible that a man should have a thousand interests as dear to him as the one to which he is bound by affection and by vows, yet it is right that more than one out of the thousand should find a place in his heart.

I cannot pass over the special attitude in which the Church of Scotland stands at this moment, as an integral part of the national constitution. The Church has been placed on her defence, and the grave question presents itself to her, how and in what spirit she is to act in the maintenance of her position as a part of the national organism. I assume that, on the great fundamental question itself, all parties within the Church, political and ecclesiastical, clerical and lay, are at one; and that every member of this House, and every office-bearer in the Church, no matter what his views on other questions debated here may be, is loyal to the Church, and is persuaded that her removal from the place of dignity and responsibility which she has so long filled would be a calamity, I do not say to the Church of Scotland herself, but almost as great to those Churches which have sprung from her, and certainly an event which

could not fail to tell for evil upon the whole Scottish people. It is now more than three hundred years since the first General Assembly of the Church met. With varying fortunes the Church of Scotland has since that time occupied a prominent and conspicuous place in the national life. And were she nothing more than an ancient edifice whose chambers were deserted and whose ruins were covered with ivy, the removal of the old landmark could not be accomplished without many a sad reflection and foreboding ; or had the Scottish Church been of foreign birth, had it been a Church forced at the beginning on the nation, and which had grown up outside of the national life, and found its support only in courts and palaces or amongst a caste who were out of sympathy with the body of the people, then, too, her removal would not have touched the real history of the country. Her removal would, indeed, have been, in another sense, a restoration, as when one sometimes sees pinnacle or spire or modern turret cleared away from old castle or cathedral, and the original design of the architect coming out to view. But the Scottish Church has a history within the national life, and not outside of it. The nation has grown up around it, and upon it. It is an essential portion of the national fabric, and it has been built into the solid masonry. The Scottish Church has been the parent and the

teacher of the nation. Her modes of thought, her faith, her loyalty, her sympathies with her children, have all grown up with the slow growth of what we call the Scottish nation. You cannot write the history of the country apart from its ecclesiastical history, nor can the history of the Church be written apart from the record of the people's struggles and progress. Whatever the future may be, the past is one full of traditions to which Scotchmen in the colonies and in all parts of the world look back with pride. The Scotland of to-day would not have been the Scotland it is, nor would she have had the place she occupies in the empire, if there had been no Church of Scotland.

One cannot shut one's eyes and ears to the fact, however, that there has grown up a large and influential body of the people, whose favour towards the Church is of a purely historical kind, in whose minds new affections and new sympathies have taken root, and in whose opinion the old should give place to a new order of things. There is not evidence enough, however, to prove that all who are receiving the ministrations of other Churches are desirous of seeing the ancient and venerable House of their own forefathers levelled. I think there is evidence the other way; but neither in the Church nor out of the Church can you expect those who are

content with the existing order to express their sentiments so vigorously as those who demand a change. The duty of the Church is all the more difficult to determine, that, as things are, there is really no line of action open to her. In the planning of a new railway, or in the reconstruction of the older parts of our great cities, we are all familiar with a preparatory process which is known by the name of scheduling. Schools, factories, and buildings of every kind which lie in the path of the projected railway, or in the proposed line of new streets, are all marked in a map, and their names are printed in a schedule, and intimation is given to the owners that their premises may one day be required for public purposes. Meanwhile the scheme is only on paper, and no decisive action has been taken, or any bill for carrying out the scheme framed. What can the owners of such scheduled tenements do? They cannot approach the legislature or courts of law, for there is no actual case to meet. Their strength is to sit still and wait, in the faith of their own right, and in steady attention to their common tasks.

It is said that when Hannibal besieged Rome, and when the city was straitly shut up, the ground on which he was encamped outside the walls was put up to auction in the market-place, and brought a fair price. Side by side with panic there was faith in

the future; and I think that even the strongest opponents of the Church of Scotland will admit that she shows energy and faith in her own future when, instead of allowing the ancient edifice to fall into disrepair, she continues to add chamber, and turret, and dome—when she continues, year by year, to increase her buildings and her parishes, and to beautify the venerable structure as if she were living in days of peace.

Doubtless one reads of great activity amongst those who desire to remove the Church, but one reads also of intense reluctance on the part of statesmen to face the subject. Every man who occupies a responsible post in the country prefers to give an evasive reply to the question when it is to be considered. The utmost that can be extracted is, "Not now," and every leading statesman declines to pledge himself at all. I could wish that our statesmen rose to the height of their noble calling, and showed the courage of their mature convictions; but the farthest they will go is to say that it is a Scottish question, and that it remains with the people of Scotland to determine when and how it shall be settled.

If the time should come when the matter shall be regarded as one for practical decision, it will be found that the great bulwark and defence of the Church of

Scotland is the character of the Church herself as it has been developed in the course of generations. Her strength in that hour will not lie in any system of tactics which may be devised for the occasion, but in what she is and has become, and in what she is in her place fitted to do ; and it will then be found that the Church has all along been unconsciously preparing for the crisis, all along been laying up in her own history in modern as well as in older days her own defence and strength. And those who judge her will find in her that character which has been impressed on her by her best men. At this moment the Church is not merely what you and I and all of us have made it. At this moment the noble thoughts and policy of such men as Dr Robertson and his successor Dr Smith are the bones and sinews of the Church. The eloquence of Norman Macleod is not silent, nor his spirit vanished ; the sagacity and comprehensive wisdom of John Cook are not lost though his presence is gone ; the clear insight into the spirit of the time which distinguished Robert Lee has not perished though he has been removed. All these and others whom I might name still live, and their influence is still felt. As in our great Highland glens where the current of water is invisible, you can trace its course down the hillside by the green tufts of grass and by the richer foliage of the trees, so does the

Church carry with it its own character ; and when I look around on her quiet parishes and populous cities, on her Mission fields, on her Committees, on her Colleges and Halls, I see men whose power and learning, whose piety and faithfulness, are an honour to the Church. These are the secret strength and glory of the Church of Scotland, and these works and virtues are the slow growth of years ; they are the discipline and fruit of a generation, and not the extempore defences of the moment ; and it is by such virtues and such deeds that the issue will be determined.

The works and defences of the Church are not such as can be constructed in view of an assault. The new parishes which have been created, the provision made for the poor in cities and mining villages, the services of religion carried into remote glens and across stormy firths,—these are the arguments on behalf of the Church. And not these only, but others more likely to escape the eye of the politician, who only notes what can be tabulated and placed in columns. There are fruits which come by long culture and much thought. There are fruits in the character of the Church and her High Courts. Her tolerance and comprehensiveness, as she looks watchfully yet tenderly on her sons ; the largeness of heart and wise discernment which can go back on her course and gather up comely ornaments which, in the day of

flight and fear, she had left behind ; the courage of the Church, inspiring her to undo what in other times she had done to those outside of her,—these patient deeds of enterprise and thought are the defence of the Church of Scotland. And it is in such virtues and such patient labours that the Church is to find her strength still. Let her rest in these ; let her take counsel and do the work of her great Lord ; and if she falls, let it be at the quiet post of duty, and not clothed in an armour she has not proved.

At the worst, the Church cannot be destroyed by alterations made in her relations to the State. If she perishes the loss will be felt when it is too late to repent ; yet it will not be hopeless or irretrievable.

The Church of Scotland lives not only in her own corporate form, but she now lives in the spirit and life of those Churches which regard her with suspicion. And her spirit and life are indestructible in them as well as in herself. She has already communicated her character to many who disown her. She has learned much, I grant, from those who have left her ; she has learned lessons of liberality and self-help which she had not acquired before, and she is not ashamed to acknowledge both the lessons and the tutors ; but she too has given, in return, of her spiritual riches. She has infused into neighbour-

ing Churches the national element; she has taught them to emancipate themselves from the narrowness and littleness of private companies of worshippers. At the present day there is hardly a Dissenting Church amongst us which does not acknowledge its responsibilities for others around them. And year by year this spirit is growing and enlarging. Other Churches than our own are becoming, in the right sense of the word, "National," and when they have advanced a little further they have not so much dis-established us as established us more firmly, and themselves as well. *Victi victoribus leges*; apparent defeat may not be a defeat so much as the spread of our laws, our language, our principles, over other communities. Higher aims than formerly are kept in view; Church Extension, Home Missions for those alienated from all religion, have a more prominent place. Congregations outside of the National Church are rising, and have risen, to the work of national religious life, and are really doing the work of a National Church. Let them do so; they are approaching nearer and nearer to the ideal of a National Establishment, and when they have thoroughly identified themselves with the spirit of such an institution, they will be less anxious to destroy the original type and pattern of them all. And even if their old antagonism survives, they carry within their own

revised constitution and character the fundamental elements of an Established and a National Church.

But whilst I take this more hopeful view of the future, I do not think it wise or desirable to accelerate the course of history, as if I were sure of the issue; and as little do I judge it wise to use doubtful means to delay the approach of a contest. The Church of Scotland belongs to no party of politics. As a Church she is national and constitutional, but like the monarch of these realms, she is above the heat and dust of party strife; and whatever private sympathies she may have, her dignity and her duty as a Church demand that she should be free. The old fable of the earthen and the iron jar holds true with her, and she knows her fate if she attaches herself to one or other of the great sections of politics. The Church, moreover, even in her times of contest, will not allow the sacred ark to be carried into the tented field for the sake of rivalry between hostile camps. The Church has a work of her own, and she will quietly do it, come what may. But she will do nothing to hasten her own decease. There are twelve hours in her day, and she will walk in the light, and perform her task till the night comes.

Appeals are sometimes made to us to renounce our position of our own accord, and, for the sake of

national religion, to lay upon the altar of righteousness what we prize and value. Appeals are made to us as if our endowments and our privileges were a wrong done to other Churches, and we are asked ourselves to redress the wrong by breaking the tie which binds us to the past, and of our own accord to exchange our position for another superior to our own. But we judge otherwise. We do not think that our position is one of injustice. And when it is urged that it must be wrong to enjoy our emoluments and privileges at the expense of the nation, we reply that such a charge only contains a portion of the truth, and that it has another side. A vast trust, it is true, has grown up out of past accumulations—accumulations too remote to be apportioned to their original contributors, and reaching back, in some cases, to the introduction of Christianity into this country. These endowments of the Church are certainly the property of the nation, but they are held by the nation *in trust for religious uses*. The nation is itself the steward, and not the owner. The Church established in the land is the present ward and beneficiary, and the nation is the guardian and trustee. The disinterestedness of the Church is no doubt open to suspicion when, on moral and religious grounds, she objects to the secularisation of these funds. But surely her argument is worth something, when she declares it to

be wrong and unjust to divert funds which have been from time immemorial devoted to the offices of religion to common use. The nation may give a new direction to such funds, and may determine, in its capacity of guardian, that the religious uses must be widened and enlarged. If so, we, as part of the nation, will carry the matter no further. And we shall not thrust ourselves upon an unwilling people, nor live on mere sufferance; but both on the ground of principle and expediency, we object to the absorption of this sacred trust into the national treasury. We cannot consent to the suggestion of other Churches—"Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it; give it for any or for all State uses—for war, for education, for prisons, for hospitals, for asylums." "No, my lord," we answer; "give her the living child,—give her, or whoever else will nurse it, this revenue, if it be used for its spiritual ends; give it to Canterbury, to Wesley; give it to the Church of Erskine, or Chalmers, or M'Crie, or to any one who will faithfully use it, but in no wise squander or destroy it. Ye have the poor always with you, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good. But this alabaster box is destined for another use." The Legislature is all-powerful, and there is no tribunal to which we can appeal should it resolve on secularisation, or be forced to it by the stress of political

pressure; but we shall not cease to hold our conviction that such an act is unjust and wrong, and we shall not cease to declare that it is contrary to all the laws which govern trusts and trust transactions in the world of daily commerce; and though it be the act of a nation, and not of an individual or a company, it is not the less subject to the laws of right and wrong, inasmuch as the magnitude and irresponsibility of a trust can never be an apology for its malversation.

One word more on equality in religion. I am willing to allow that the plea for equality is often used with reference to privilege rather than to money, and that it is the Establishment and not the Endowment which creates the offence and appears injustice. But I have not seen this argument fully, and, as I conceive, fairly developed. And I am at a loss to know whether the suppression of its natural outcome is due to the reserve which springs from doubt and fear, or whether the tendency of the argument itself has not been apprehended. When I am appealed to by those who are aggrieved, whether I will not at once, as an act of justice, consent to be placed on an equality with my brethren outside the Church, I withhold my reply until I have asked another question in turn. I would ask whether all religious privilege as at present possessed by estab-

lished or unestablished religion be not an inequality? Equality in religion does not mean merely equality of one religious community with another, but the equality of a religious custom or law or tradition with systems which disown religion altogether. If it is wrong for one Christian Church to take, in any form, precedence, equally wrong must it be for the *Christian religion* to take precedence in a State, and give shape to the laws or customs of society in the face of opposition from a minority, however small. If religious inequality amongst Churches is an injustice and a wrong, equally unjust and wrong is it to forbid any act, on the ground that it is irreligious. There are people to whom our religion is no better than irreligion; but there are also people whose opinions are equally abhorrent to us, and it is an unfair and illogical makeshift to concuss them into acquiescence with our laws or customs, on the plea that what they call their religion is not religion at all, but irreligion. Who is to judge what is not conscience and religion? Are we then to carry the argument of religious equality to its legitimate issue; or are we to stop somewhere, and draw the line before we arrive at the brink of negation or agnosticism, or something further on still? This is the alternative which I have not seen faced, by those who appeal to us on the plea of inequality

and injustice; and it seems to me a reasonable demand on our part, that before we, of our own accord, respond to the appeal on the subject of religious equality, we should have a definite statement of what religious equality means. As long as those who appeal to us employ the phrase amongst themselves, and for their own use, I do not press for an explanation; but if they invite us to accompany them, it is not asking too much to request them to say how far they intend us to go, and who are the wayfarers with whom we are expected to sojourn, and under what conditions we are to travel in company. Before we halt as a Church in our course, to make a new start in the direction of equality, it is surely reasonable to ascertain what those who beckon us understand by religious equality—whether it signifies equality of Presbyterians, or equality of Protestants, or equality of Christians, or equality with all men in the region of religious belief or unbelief. Still more is it desirable to ascertain what are the social and national results which such religious equality involves, and how far it is to modify the legislation, the customs, the observances which have sprung from the supremacy of the Christian religion during the past ages.

It would ill become me in my own name to venture on a single word which savoured of counsel to

fathers and brethren in this house, who, in years and wisdom, and experience, far exceed me, and at whose feet I am content to sit. But through the kindness and indulgence of this Assembly, I am for the time being admitted to a place where my voice is heard; and in any words which I utter I would receive them as meant first of all for my own use during a brief period of official influence. I can speak all the more freely that there never, perhaps, was a time in the history of ecclesiastical affairs when there was less party spirit and less evidence of a desire on the part of those who might well claim precedence, to head a section, or to form a school in the business or policy of the Church. Yet with all these great advantages on the side of moderation and self-reserve, it happens that the numbers who take part in the conduct of affairs in our Assembly are comparatively few. This is at once an advantage and a drawback. It tends, I am sure, to the more vigorous and mature despatch of business, but it also has the effect of drying up the sources of coming ability and capacity. I have not seen almost any individual formally discouraged; and probably there never was an Assembly in which more of the younger members took part in the debates; and therefore, again, I can speak all the more freely when I say, that if every question which comes before a great Assembly falls at once into the hands of those

whose experience in public matters is extensive and full, it is hardly possible for a younger member of that Assembly, even if some fresh view should present itself to him, to run the risk of protracting the sitting and drawing on the patience of his brethren. I know how difficult it is for a man, and for a dozen men, who see at a glance what ought in any given case of emergency to be done, to withhold their counsel, and to listen to hesitating and irrelevant comments on it. But if I were to offer a remark, I would sometimes say to the wisest and best-informed, Have faith in the future, and believe it possible for things to be well done, even when you have no hand in the doing of them. Nay, I would perhaps go farther, and say—as I have once or twice good-humouredly, and as a paradox, said to dear and able friends in the ear what may be spoken from the house-top—“Have faith to let things, some things at least, go wrong, or be imperfectly done.” The wrongness will soon right itself, and the imperfection will come to an end. Doubtless there are questions of great moment which belong of right and of usage to those whom the whole Church recognises; but these questions will all the more readily, and of universal consent, be left to their keeping if in matters of lesser moment the responsibility is allowed to rest with men who have still much to learn. I am no

stickler for Presbyterian parity when it is carried beyond the limits of good sense and practical administration ; but there are times when it is well to let the younger members of the Church hear each other's voices, and especially in the presence of older and more experienced men, whose guidance may be relied on. I am anxious for the future welfare of the Church, no less than for its present good ; and I am anxious that those who are rising up around us should feel their way, and be encouraged to attain to that readiness and accuracy in word and act which can only come of experience.

Year by year our Assembly experiences the inevitable changes of time, and year by year we are called to mourn the loss of those who have taken a prominent part in its affairs. This Assembly has already expressed its sorrow for the death of one who, a few years ago, presided over this court with great tact and rigid impartiality, and with a dignity which never suffered from its alliance to the keenest wit. Dr Gillan was a man whose character, like that of many others, was apt to be misjudged by hasty observers. The sparkling humour, ever bursting forth and flooding at times the more conventional paths, led some who knew him superficially to mistake his mirth for levity ; but those who knew him

better were aware that this was but the surface-ripple of a soul which had its calm recesses and its deep waters. If now and again there came forth a remark which startled more than the straitest precisian, it was rooted in deep veneration for all that was sacred ; for I never knew a man more reverent in spirit, more solicitous for the honour of religious truth, or more sincerely devoted to the faith of our Church.

Many others, eminent and useful in their place and work in the Church, have been removed from their task ; and as we cast our thoughts backward a few years, and call to mind those who sat here, and whose words never failed to win attention, their presence seems more real than our own,—“they are the substance, and we are the shadows.” They live in our memories, and their faces and voices are so vividly before us that we almost doubt if we have a right to sit in their room. They have served their generation, and their work is done. To us, for a time, is committed the torch which has dropped from their hands : let us take it up devoutly, holding it firmly and walking in the light of it ourselves, until we in our turn yield it to others. And may those who come after us find their courage inspired by our example, and their capacities for serving God enriched by the spiritual inheritance which we bequeath to them !

376 *Concluding Address to General Assembly.*

Right Reverend and Right Honourable,—I have availed myself too largely of my privilege and of your kind indulgence. Part we now with words of mutual salutation and counsel. “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” “Finally, brethren, farewell! Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”

THE END.

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